

THE VISION OF SIVA IN PERIYAPURANAM

RATNA MA NAVARATNAM



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1987

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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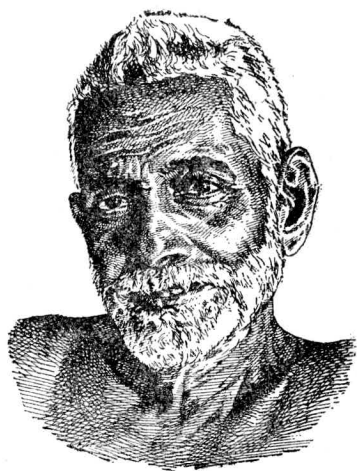
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Anma Samarpanam
To
Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi
Himself the epitome of the 'Sixty-Three'



*Life pours forth from the incomparable
grace of Thy steady and shining eyes*

*O Ramana ! what kind of silence is this ?
It has no parallel on earth, my Lord.*

INTRODUCTION

Tiruvedakam, a hallowed hamlet, near the Pandyan capital city of Madurai was the scene of the crowning experience of Sivam, enacted by the foremost of the Saiva saints, Sambandar extolled by Sekillar in Periyapuramam. We stood by the bank of the now dried up Vaikai river and watched the silent towers of the Siva temple with the rising sun spreading its shafts of light over the rice fields and palm groves. Is this the sacred place which witnessed the terminal victory of Siva's supremacy over alien creeds and cults by the crest jewel of the luminous Siva—the child of Siva-Parvathi, Tirujnanasambandar?

The author of the Epic of Periyapuramam highlights this magnificent episode as an extraordinary testament of the direct perception of Siva by the extraordinary child saint under extraordinary circumstances, which marked a significant land-mark in the history of Saivism in India.

Like the divinely inspired Vedas, the sacred collections of *Tirumurais* sung by the key custodians of Saivism among the sixty three Saints delineated in Periyapuramam extol the supreme Reality of Para Sivam, the absolute One, who manifests His Grace in the universe of non-sentient and sentient beings. In a world of changing phases, the vision of Siva gleams as the value of values. Sekillar cites authentic incidents where the power of Siva destroys poison and tames a wild elephant. It is not subject to consumption by fire, and gives life to bones and overcomes the law of gravitation by making a granite stone float in water. It resists the river current and makes a crocodile disgorge a child which it had swallowed and digested. Such is the infinite power of Siva attested by men of vision and wisdom in Periyapuramam.

St. Sambandar's canto called *Tirupasuram* constitutes a unique composition, celebrating a unique event of Siva-consciousness enacted in the seventh century, in the heyday of

the Pandyan monarchs. Sekillar in the twelfth century gives an exhaustive commentary on this great song of songs-*Tirupasuram*, in his magnum opus of Periyapuramam, a singular distinction which is not given to any other Tirumurai collection of songs or cantos cited by him. The Vision of Siva stands out pre-eminently in the *Trunpasuram*, as elucidated by the author Sekillar in the section on the life and teachings of Tirujnana Sambandar:

Sekillar intones ;

**“May the Vedic way of life prosper,
May the Saiva Neri for ever shine,
May all living beings flourish in faith—
That was the purport of the innocent cry
Of the child Tirujnana Sambandar of Pukali
We bow our heads unto his fragrant feet
His godly service, we begin to proclaim.”**

Here is an allusion to the enlightenment of the child born in the sacred city of Seerkali, and who at the age of three cried out in hunger and was fed by the milk of wisdom by the divine Mother Parvathi. The famous Thevaram sung by Sambandar on this occasion forms the grand opening song of the Twelve Tirumurais, when the inspired child was granted the direct vision of Siva :

**“Lo, there He is before me in all His splendour
The great Lord presiding over Brahmapuram
The thief who has stolen my heart.”**

Sekillar depicts in tuneful melodious verse, the significance of this wonderful illumination:

**“Sambandar, the prince of illumined seers,
Attained the divine wisdom of Siva-jnanam,
That leads to the eradication of birth and death
The matchless knowledge of Truth, he experienced,”**

Sambandar's journey of life for thirteen years thereafter was filled with rapturous devotion and illumination as he visited different shrines in different parts of the Chera, Chola and Pandyan countries, singing Thevaram hymns in mellifluous poetry in praise of Siva and his inherent power of Sakti, effecting many miracles and transforming the common people to live the saiva way of life. The Pandyan territory of his time was overrun by Jains and the Pandyan king had abandoned the saiva faith, and Sambandar was called upon by the Queen and the Prime Minister to avert the distress of the people and restore the saiva faith to its pristine glory. Sambandar assured everyone that the Presence of Siva enthroned in his heart would prove beneficial and faultlessly good to all Siva's chosen devotees.

Sekillar next proceeds to describe the cowardly act of setting fire to the camp of Sambandar and his followers by the heretics who feared his exalted presence in Madurai. Sambandar invokes the aid of the crimson Lord Siva of the holy city of Madurai, and bids the flaming fire lit by the Jains to retrace its way to the king, Kun Pandyan, for he was indirectly patronising the Jains.

Here was stepped up the crisis of fierce controversy and mounting opposition of the Jaina hierarchy, when they could not cure the king's acute colic pain. Sambandar was called upon to relieve the king's ailment. The famous canto on the Holy Ash was sung by this child of Siva, and the king was cured of his deadly disease. The king and the kingdom of the premier Tamil State were won over by the *Will* of Siva working in and through the enlightened child Sambandar. Wrong was righted; justice and the saiva way of life triumphed; The Temple of Siva-Alayai at Madurai became a power centre and the river Vaikai was filled to the brim with the waters of His grace.

Yet the Jains remained obdurate and obstinate, and challenged the Saiva exponent, whom they ridiculed as a "babbling ignoramus" to another test termed "Analvadam". Each

party agreed to put their sacred *ola* scroll into a burning hearth and here too, the Jains were confounded because their script was burnt to ashes, whereas the Saiva Thevaram script of Sambandar withstood the flames and remained intact. Finally the Jain monks proposed the flood-resisting contest in the Vaikai river, confidently pledging their lives as a stake in case of defeat, and applied it to the opposing party too. It came to be known as the *Punalvaadam* contest.

This was the turning point in the mission of Tirujnanasambandar, and the revelation of the omnipotence and omniscience of Siva, the supreme almighty God. Sambandar sang the Tirupasuram Ode of twelve verses and it was written on a palm leaf, while the Jains wrote down their salient doctrine—*Atti-Natti* (Yes-no), and both parties floated their Scrolls on the river. The *Tirupasuram* Scroll not only resisted the current, but swam swiftly in the opposite direction to the amazement of everyone, while the Jain Script was swept with the rushing current towards the sea. It was a historic occasion which demonstrated to the world, the infallible Truth of Saivism and the transcendent-immanent glory of Siva.

Tirupasuram embodies the vision of Siva and the teachings contained in the Vedas and the Saiva Agamas in a nutshell. The opening benedictory verse pronounces the blessing that follows true and pious worship of the sovereign Ruler of the universe, the power of whose Name drives away all evil forces and establishes the reign of benevolence, peace and plenty:

**“May Antanar (upholders of dharma), devas and kine
prosper,**

May the refreshing showers of rain pour down,

Long live the Ruler in resplendent greatness.

Let evil perish and Haran’s (Siva) Name all reflect

So that the world be relieved of suffering.”

St. Sekillar comments in detail on each of the twelve verses with meticulous care, as Parasivam whose mighty

wisdom and power were within the easy grasp of the enlightened son of Seerkali fame, and yet incomprehensible was He to the commonality of the people. Again and again Sekillar poses the question, "Who can fathom His invincible majesty?" Siva is *seen* by His fervent devotees (lovers) pervading the whole cosmos, creating, sustaining and dissolving the universe of matter and living beings, deluding the ken of ordinary mortals, but experienced and enjoyed by his devotees in His form and formless states. There is fire in the palm of His hand. He rides the bull. He carries the crescent moon and the Ganges on the locks, and is clad with tiger skin and adorned with snakes. He is blue-throated. He haunts the cremation ground. Ah! He is difficult to Comprehend in His myriad forms!

"Ariya Kaadchiar....Aayinum Periyaar.

Aar arivaar avar pettiye."

"Yet immeasurably great is our Siva" is the pronouncement of Sekillar. The readers must contemplate on this wonderful Hymn on Siva, only after an in-depth study of the sacred Vedas and Agamas and the mythical truths contained in the Puranas and follow the ritual of temple worship and the yoga of internal worship. Then only can they comprehend the essence hidden beneath the multiplicity of Siva's Forms and Deeds revealed in these Sacred Texts. True lovers who concentrate on His Name succeed in rooting out all evil propensities, and purged from impurities imposed by the external and internal senses and egoity, they experience with the eye of love, the bliss of *mei-jnanam*—Self Awareness. "He who is unique, who has no father nor mother, who is birthless and deathless is realised as father and mother, ever so near and intimate in communion," is Sekillar's comment on Sambandar's query in his Hymn:

"What sort of Being is our Father ?"

"Enthaiyaar avar evvapai yaar ?"

How to describe the indescribable in words?

"Ek kootrin mozhiya, thentru?"

The divine Grace, the submission to His *Will* represent the supreme function of Siva, and contemplating ceaselessly on the presence, the immanence of Siva, internally and in the external world of nature and by taking the armour of His Name, all varieties of delusion and bondage associated with the pristine impurity of 'anavam', Sekillar's "*Iru vinai poimai valirul*," are cast aside, subdued and purified.

In this state of transformation, Sambandar bids "all devout souls" (ezhuvaar) to arise from their slumbering state (Kevalam—lonely) and pass into the natural state of being (Sakala—of the world) and finally into the pure (Suddha—heavenly) state of realising the bliss of Siva.

"Come ye tranquil sages and attain your goal.

Arise those who know (arivaar)

Arise the people of the world (ulagathavar).

Arise all the virtuous people (Nalaarhal).

God is One only. He reveals to us as many-

Haran, our father (enthai) the primal One (aathi)

Our shining One (Enkal jyothi), the three-eyed Deity
(mukkan murthi)

The lord of the souls (Bhuta-muthalvan), the Supreme
Lord (Peruman).

He is eternal Light (Anthamil Ozhi)."

This monotheistic conception of God in the Saiva Religion is emphasised again and again, by reiterating the magnetic incantation of His Name only, (Aran naamame) as the most efficacious sadhana (daily practice) to realise the Presence of Siva within each one's inner core of being. Sekillar warns all to abjure from logical disputes and controversies as barren intellects cannot prove the immensity of Para Sivam.

"Deserving souls are blessed by His Grace"

"Aadpaalavarku arulum vannam."

**“Come all who are bowed by the burden of suffering,
Give your heart to Him alone.
Come and abide in Him—All devout seekers.”**

**“Maa Dhukam Neenghal uruviir,
Manam patti vazhmin.
Saadhukal mikiir Iraiye vanthu Saarmin Kazhe.”**

Meditate on His Presence and take up the incessant remembrance of His Name, and surely as day follows night, you will be freed from anguish and painful assaults in life, “Behold the effulgent Light of Siva, ever within your inner heart, suffused with love.”

**“Aadhi chudar jyothiyai
Anbin ahathul aaki . . .
Porunthi Vaazhmin.”**

“Enjoy the vision of Siva and live in harmony,” is the eternal message of the Saiva Nayanmar and this undying call to humanity is the epitome of the Periyapuranam sung by Sekillar.

**“Realise Siva through His Grace.
Seek not proof in vain.
Self evident is His Grace.”**

“He reveals His own truth”, chimes the *Mundaka Upanishad*. iii-ii.3. “Being subtler than the subtlest, He is beyond the scope of argumentation. It is easy to understand Him, dearest, when declared by a competent Teacher”. *Katha Upanishad*. . . ii. 8—9.

Siva-Dharsanam (Siva-Vision) is a reality for Tirujnana-sambandhar at every split second of his life, and so it has been with every sanctified Saiva saint and preceptor from palaeolithic age down to our nuclear age. Irrefutable is the evidence of the Vedas, Agamas, and Puranas cited by Sambandar in his *Tirupasuram*, and elaborately interpreted by the author of Periyapuranam on the sublime, ineffable potency and actuality of Siva’s *Arul*, *Karunai* or *Grace*

“Melaam Karunai thiram em Guruventhar vaithaar,”

Sekillar points out that in the inspiring canto beginning with the Vedic Lord (Veda-muthalvan), Sambandar who did not have any book-knowledge advocates an earnest study of the eighteen Puranas, which had their origins in the benign Grace of the First One, and which had been communicated through Sage Soothan's vibrant puranic lore. They possess truths that give comfort and remedial measures to those who believe in the reality of God and His Grace, but these will appear incredulous fables to the unbelievers. "He appears false to the doubters and truth eternal to those who are devoted to Him."

Sekillar concludes his commentary so explicit on the validity of the Siva-dharsanam enjoyed by the foremost of the sixty-three Saiva saints, St. Tirujnanasambandar, by recounting once more, the incident of the scroll inscribed with the opening Hymn of the Tirupasuram Ode, floating and resisting the current of the Vaikai water and Kulaichirayar, the Minister of the Pandyan King Kun Nedumaran, who followed the scroll picked it at the bank of the Vaikai at Tiruvedakam. The grand sight was witnessed by the king and people, testifying Sambandar's role as the emissary of Siva's —*Perunkarunai* mighty Grace of Siva.

Tirupasuram's crowning concluding canto testifies that all those who saw the enactment of Siva's vision of Truth at Tiruvedakam were convinced that the "*Love of the Lord Siva truly was the culminating finale of the supreme knowledge of God. "Tus spoke the enlightened one who drank the milk of wisdom."*

"Jnanam Isan paal anbe' entranar jnanam undaar."

Sekillar bids us open the pages of his Periyapuranam and study at first hand the *Vision of Siva* vouchsafed to each of the distinguished galaxy of Saiva Saints, and experience in turn the presence of Siva's Grace in our interior being. He bids farewell in touching poetic strains:

“I have adored the truth-revealing Tirupasuram Ode of St. Sambandar. It is not that I have understood the profound depth of its essence. I have sought in my humble way to follow in his footprints, and reverentially praised his poem of poems on the splendour of Siva to the best of my ability, impelled by unutterable love.”

Now, with hearts and minds tuned to enjoy Sakillar's Periyapuram applauded as the Tamil Vedam by the Saivite world, let the readers move forward to enshrine the facets of the visionary gleams of Siva reflected in the pages that follow : “May His luminous excellence permeate the Universe”

Ramanasramam
Tiruvannamalai

Kasi Navaratnam

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HINDU DHARMA MEETS NUCLEAR SCIENCE

It is important to keep Science and Religion in their respective spheres of influence. Scientists are desperately trying to find out the Oneness long proclaimed by the Hindu seers in the realm of religion. Today the realm of nature is explored with an intensity unknown in the past in order to validate the truth of unity, beauty and symmetry of Oneness behind the forces of nature.

Thus, seeking the unification of forces as well as searching for the fundamental entity of matter, man hopes to find the key to unfold the unity behind existence. The fundamental force and the basic entity of matter will ultimately converge at the mid-point, where a super-force is at work. The outer cosmos as well as man's inner self is moved by the consciousness of Being. The fundamental totality of Being—the *Parasivam*—initiates the *Will* to move the sun, the earth and the stellar universe. It is the same force which spurs frail man in his space flights as well as causes the lotus bud to open at the touch of the rays of the morning sun.

These insights are now shared by the saint and the scientist, the poet and the philosopher. Thus today, physics and all other physical sciences have lost their self-assurance and are veering to the orbital dimension of metaphysics. Profound faith and clarity in objective investigation of the outer worlds go hand in hand for one tuned to 'Infinite Living.'

It is the grand exploration of the scientists into the complex patterns of relationships that govern the movement of

the universe that has brought them to share their viewpoints with that of the "spiritual power" within man, and thereby arrive at the unification of the fundamental forces governing the existence of man on earth. The integral relationships of the powers within and without, once unravelled, the Reality of man and nature stands revealed.

Unified am I, quite undivided

Unified my soul, unified my sight, my hearing;

Unified my breathing—both in and out

Unified, quite undivided am I, the whole of me.

—*Atharvaveda*

No dichotomy intervenes. All is perfect symmetry and relativity yields to absolute Oneness.

In the foot-prints of the great Hindu teachers, every Hindu is reminded of God at every moment of his living hours, as there is no hard-and-fast division between the profane and the sacred. Every son of the soil seeks union with God, while ploughing the fields or rocking the baby to sleep; waking or sleeping, the Hindu is aware of the wink of eternity in the midst of the transient phases of his life :

The majesty of Him who activates each and all

To revolve in rhythmic motion—How shall I evoke ?

—*Tiruvacagam V. 2.15*

Can the transcendent unity established by the seers of India, the breath of eternity spelt out in the *Upanishads* and the Saiva *Tirumurais* be proved in the crucible of scientific experiment ? Physics will certainly investigate and it will add its own insights to the inquiring human spirit. The broken symmetries now in vogue will be replaced as man takes the study of matter to higher planes, so that nature appears simple and unified.

A fundamental explanation for uniting both the *correct*, proper and elegant form as well as the *uccishta*, the ugly, deformed and *incorrect form* may lead to the Truth of the whole, the fulness or plenum of perfection. Such an insight is possible not in the leading science laboratories of the world, but in the laboratory of the human mind and heart, in the spirit of man embracing the Rtam (order or symmetry) of the universe within his inner self, in the "consciousness of being." Tayumanavar brings out in the following poem the beauty of such an insight :

From the five elements to nada-vibration Thou madest
me see

Everything as false : Thyself to me unveiled
shining

In the core of my intelligence and bade me
Stand still, free, all-filling, without beginning and end
And skillfully established me, O mother
Who vouchsafed pure knowledge and bliss
Yielding all that the heart desired;
Forgetting Thee can I poor wretch live ?
Darling of the three-Eyed Lord ! Of all ills
The panacea beyond the reach of them
That lack the inner eye which illumines
The Vedas and excellent Agamas.....

To end my woes, will Thou vouchsafe
The knowledge of Thy world of Silence,
Thou whose Form is vibration and the great Word ?
O pure Space, there where vibration ceases !
Mighty Substance beyond the ken of brawling
religions !

—St. Tayumanavar 3.8

Surely the tradition in which one is brought up does determine the quality of such insights. *Nadam*—sound vibration—and

rhythm will open new chapters in physics, building up the broken symmetries into perfect synchronisation of matter and energy as one integral whole.

India has had a scientific tradition which was no less important than its spiritual tradition. We can testify to the scientific consciousness among our people by setting the inquiring mind to dwell on the architecture of the temples of India, their dances and the symphony of music based on rhythm and resonance. The Dance of Siva Nataraja, the towering gopurams, sculptured pillars, Bharatanatya dances and the *mridangam* music reflect the value of beauty in symmetry.

The countless worlds of the universe,
 They are differentiations of primordial matter.
 Thou, the Light which illumines the eight quarters,
 I know and lovingly cling to it
 . . . O Stillness beyond the ken of earth and
 elements !

Maxwell unified the forces of electricity and magnetism. He proved that *light (Oli)* was one manifestation of this unification. Einstein unified the concepts of space and time. Essentially all matter we see around us is made up of *four basic particles*. These are the two *nuclear* particles, the proton and the neutron, and the two so-called *light* particles, the electron and the neutrino. The sub-atomic particles of nature, proton and electron, and the suborganic particles known as neutrons were again classified into quarks and gluons and all influenced by a strong nuclear force. Other particles which are indivisible and not subject to strong nuclear force are called leptons. Finally, the *quarks* and *leptons* are seen to be the ultimate building blocks of the universe. It is not ruled out that the quantum world can resemble an onion with layers laid on, without arriving at the final layer.

There are also *four basic forces* which govern the behaviour of these particles, when they come close to each other. There is the gravitational force which keeps the planets in an orbit around the sun, and which controls the behaviour of the planets of the universe we live in. Next, there is the electromagnetic force, where magnetic forces are produced by electric charges in motion. The proton-electron force is responsible for holding atoms together. It is this force which governs all known phenomena of life on earth. The third is a weak nuclear force where all particles interact with each other, provided they are close together, and this force is responsible for the existence of heavy elements on the earth. Lastly, there is the strong nuclear force. Protons and neutrons carry a strong nuclear charge which is responsible for holding the nuclei together. The phenomenon of *fusion* responsible for making the sun shine, and *fission* which powers the present generation of nuclear reactors are aspects of this force.

Thus the *four basic entities* and the *four basic forces* present a concept of the universe in its static and kinetic states. Physicists hoped that these four distinct forces could be unified into a simple basic force of which the four known forces are different facets. Einstein wished to comprehend this sing'le unified force as a geometrical property of the space-time manifold we live in. He was frustrated because this unified force could *not* be conceived as a geometrical property of the space-time manifold. It had to transcend and go beyond the space-time dimension structure, as the Saiva Siddhantin understands the universe of matter and energy.

We certainly do not wish to read modern physics into our ancient scriptures. But we can cultivate that correct attitude and not forsake *direct perception* in favour of the empirical method. This unification of forces could not have been enshrined in the space-time firmament, as this magnificent unity is of very great and powerful stature, exceeding the limits of time-space and the universe, immeasurable,



SOURCES AND RESOURCES OF THE SIVA TRADITION

It is clear from the existing literary records of Tamilakam, like *Tholkapiam* and *Purananuru* and other early Tamil Sangam classics, that the ancient Tamils gave little thought to metaphysical or philosophic speculations. Life in those ancient times was full of hardships and the people looked up to heroes who were full of courage and possessed of keen intellect. Their valour was sung by bards and prowess in the battlefield became the favourite theme of poetry. Heroism and human relationships of love and virtuous action were exalted to the position of religion. Regional gods like Murugan, Seyon, Mayon and Korravai were worshipped as deities of victorious valour and achievement.

In ancient Tamil society, wise men, scholars, *Arivar* and world-detached *Thaapathar* too were highly esteemed as having attained truth and invariably these were the votaries of Siva, the God of Truth. To those who swerved from the path of virtuous action, He appeared as the God of Destruction. The myths of Tripura Samhara and the vanquishing of Yama, the God of Death, and the scourge of Ravana reveal some insights into the religious aspirations of the old Tamilakam people.

By the second century A.D. came the ferment introduced by Jains and Buddhists and with the introduction of their philosophies came the need to formulate a system of thought, founded on the Vedic and Agamic tradition, incorporating the course of conduct established in the *Vaidika Dharma*, and meeting the challenges of this age of intellectual activity.

It is at this time that Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukural* and Avvaiyar's axiomatic maxims had universal appeal. The disciplined life (*Thuravaram*) of the ascetics (renunciates), the ordered and virtuous life (*Illarum*) of the citizens of the state, with singularly well-defined norms to produce and utilise wealth and regulated avenues of pleasures and self-fulfilment through marital love and social duties were upheld as the major objectives of life—*Aram*, *Porul* and *Inpam*.

This period was followed by the age of aggressive religious rivalries between Jainism, Buddhism, and the Nyaya, Vaiseshika and Lokayata systems during the age of the *Manimekalai* and *Silappadikaram* epics. Then came the dark period in Tamilakam when kings, rulers and ruled were ravaged on all fronts. There were political conquests and religious invasions, economic depressions and social conflicts and even natural disasters like floods and deluges as well as droughts and famine.

It was during this period from the third century A.D. onwards, a period of intense crisis and transition, that the Yoga system of philosophy began to appear in Tamilakam. The Agamas and Tantras, the Vedic rituals of sacrificial halls and Yaga-salais and temple worship were revived at the level of the people and, though not enjoying royal patronage, the Saiva traditions were kept in continual renewal and integral harmony in the face of external pressures and ruling class oppression. This was the dark era when the Chola and Pandyan dynasties suffered total eclipse.

This period witnessed the exclusive influence of the yogis and siddhars, who by their reclusive lives kept alive the traditional beliefs and truths of the Saiva religion. The sages and mystics like Patanjali, Vyagrahпада, Agastyar and Thiruvalluvar represented the Yoga, Agamic and Tantric systems of the siddhars. to which category was added Karai-kal Ammayar and Cholan Chengannan, the builder of many Saiva temples,

Thus the Agamic cult of worship which preserved its age-old continuity even as a secret cult in the age of transition filtered to the masses, and made rapid strides during the period of St. Tirujnana Sambandar and St. Appar of the early seventh century. This infiltration became pronounced during the centuries following as testified to in the eleven *Tirumurai*s culminating in the twelfth century. This period marked the glorious epoch of the Chola and Pandyan ascendancy, with Sekillar's magnum opus of the *Periyapuranam*, containing the lives of the sixty-three Saiva saints as the crowning achievement. It was followed by the age of the Saiva philosophers, who gave to the world the codified Saiva Siddhanta philosophy in their Meikanda Sastras.

Value Norms in Classical Texts :

It is accepted that reality is capable of being divided into segments, as many as the people desire, in consonance with their own psycho-linguistic background, while at the same time preserving the Vedic and Agamic resonances common to the Indian tradition. This is the secret of India's Sanathana Dharma, her Integral Vision of the One Supreme Reality.

Fresh insights can be gained by focussing greater attention on key classical texts like *Tholkappiam*, *Tirumantiram* and *Tirukural*, which are composed in *Sentamil*, the perfected language of the Tamils. Their subliminal connotations clearly indicate their influences on the lives of the people inhabiting the South-land (Then-nadu) who espoused the Saiva Siddhanta pathway to Reality. From the age of their composition until the present time, these source books with their all-embracing content and functional value have played a significant role in the entire religious, cultural, spiritual and social life of the Tamil people.

Tholkappiam reflects a richly endowed grammar of life. The author Tholkappianar is reputed to have been a disciple of the great Agasthiyar, whose "Agasthyam" was believed

to have been revealed by Lord Siva. Undoubtedly Tholkappianar must have had a scholarly and inquiring mind and was most certainly a Saivite. Again, the orthodox Saiva tradition was embodied in the tenth *Tirumurai* called *Tirumantiram*, whose mystic language and subtle range of exposition on major fields of religious activity still remains a mystery to most research scholars. *Tirukural*, one of the well-known source books of the Tamil tradition, consists of a comprehensive code of life; it is a veritable litany of wisdom which has been upheld by the Saivite world even today.

The purpose of knowledge inculcated in these early source books is to lead to action on "things and beings" based on inter-connected affinities. These source books still in current circulation testify to man's willingness to reach an *intuitive knowledge of the essence of things*. In this process, he gains an insight which helps him to influence them from the inside.

It is freely admitted in Tamil culture that a life of critical inquiry can be compatible with a life of faith. A man's faith is what his tradition means to him. It is also what the universe means to him in the light of that tradition. The objective data of a tradition can be gleaned from some of the source books cited by us, and are observable by a historian or a philosopher. At the same time, it should be made clear that the reassuring facts of personal faith add a heightened insight to man's accumulated religious tradition.

Tholkappiam, *Tirumantiram*, *Tirukural*, *Tirumurais*, *Periyapuranam*, *Sivajnana Bodham*, *Siddhar* and *Sivapiragasam* unfold not merely a succession of records of man's penetration into diverse field-forces of existence, but also a fascinating pageant of man's fulfilment of the sovereign purpose of human life. The study of any one particular Text affords an outlet to examine one particular stage in the history of that particular people, as revealing their intertwined cultural strands. The Tamils have developed a profound feeling of affinities for their environment (*Thinai* or setting) with a

network of dynamic correlations. Their belief in ceaseless transmutations makes them see into the impermanence of life. That strengthened their affinity to the unchanging One, the ground of all existence.

Tholkappianar has related the development of the Tamil language to the phenomena of life termed *Porul*. His masterly study on the nuances of Tamil letters, words, conjunctions and conjugations, syntax and figures of speech, prosody, established usage and aesthetics as being intimately related to the subjective and objective phases of life has been acclaimed as a unique contribution to the development of Indian thought.

These ancient classics classify the terrestrial home of the Tamils into specified regions, each with its presiding deity. In natural surroundings men and women pursue, each his own vocation, with due recognition of the code of love and moral duties. They aspire to live in sweet domestic felicity within the discipline of an ordered society.

That life amidst changing configurations should conform to the permanent values was the beginning of the search after eternal Truth. *Tholkappiam*, written some twenty-five centuries ago, has worked out some of the value-norms as “*valarntha arivin iyalpu vaalvithale*”, “To live and let live is the goal of enlightened wisdom.”

Freed from karmic actions and infused with wisdom
To him was revealed the first One—the Primal One.

Thol. Marapiyal 91

It is evident that the early Tamils held a life of enlightened concord and harmony in higher esteem than one of exclusive worship of God and performance of rituals.

Thus we see that poetry and religious sentiment sprang from the ethic of love as the central theme and had their roots in the soil. Spontaneous love and heroic feats dominated

the Sangam classics. The code of conduct of the early Tamils was related to the five types of regions where they lived and moved and each region enjoyed the protection of a special deity.

The "Marutham" or agricultural fields and plains, "Kurinji" or hills and dales, "Mullai" or pastoral lands and woodlands, "Neithal" or littoral regions and "paallai" or wastelands enjoyed the protection of specific deities. They were known as Mayon, the all-pervasive one, Seyon, the incomprehensible one, Venthan, the ruler, Varunan, the bestower of blessings, and Korrtavai, the mother goddess. These local deities pointed the way to the Supreme First One called *Muthalvan* (*Purnanuru* 16.62) also designated as *Kadavul* and *Mukkannan*, the God with Three Eyes—*Purananuru* 6.18.

The categories of existence were broadly classified as *Muthal* or *Primary*, *Karu* or *Seminal* and *Uri* or *norms*, *subjective* and *objective*. Man's life in the external plane (*puram*) was closely interconnected with that of his internal (*aham*) consciousness. Here lies the genesis of one of the cardinal tenets of Siddhanta Saivism—*That which is in the macrocosm lies embedded in the microcosm*. The lives of the sixty-three Saiva Elect validate the dynamic integral links between the 'Aham' and 'Puram' aspects of Reality.

The typical Tamil word *Kadavul* expresses both the transcendental and immanent aspects of God. *Kada* connotes the sense of transcending all categories of existence, and *vul* signifies the Indweller who activates the *uyir*, soul, from within.

The Lord who is beyond perception,
He cannot be discerned by those
Who do not seek from inside.

—*St. Appar*

In *Tholkappiam* is traced the efficacy of *uyir* or vowels in conjunction with the *mei* or consonants. The word *uyir*

also connotes the Soul, as *Mei* denotes Truth. The section on Integral Combinations, *Punarcchiiyal* is philosophic in its import. Here morphology gives place to Saiva Siddhanta philosophy—that the fruits of one's actions, good and bad, lead inevitably to the experience of happiness or misery in life. In the classical poem of *Paripadal*, the poet communicates the axiomatic truth of interconnectedness of Pathi (God), Pasu (soul) and Paasam (material universe).

Not gold nor possessions do we crave,
But Thy Grace (arul) do we implore and praise,
That our deeds and goodly acts of love
May flourish in harmony.

The goal of life moved from worldly supremacy to the attainment of immortal union at *His Feet*. Students of philology and philosophy will certainly gain profound insights by an attentive study of these classical source texts. We give but one example to prove our assertion. The combination or interconnection, (*Punarcchi*) of the Tamil words, *Thaall* (feet) and *Thalai* (head), transforms the suffix of the first word “*ll*” and the prefix of the other word “*th*” to change to *da* in conjunction as *Thaadalai* signifying “*Thy Feet uniting with my head.*” The Reality of Integral Oneness follows a simple rule of linguistic science in the *Punariyal*—(affinity links) section of *Tholkappiam*, the grammar of life. Its philosophic import is elaborated in *Tiruvacagam's* well-known Ode on “*Punarcchi Pathu*”, integral links dealing with the spontaneous union of the soul—uyir—with God.

The lustre that transcends word and content
In mystic union to commune, oh when
Shall I unite with my flawless *Gem* ?

—*Tiruvacagam* 27.4

When shall my crown (*Thalai*—head)
Speed to thy *malar Adi* (*Thaall*, flowery Feet)
In inseparable union ?

—*Tiruvacagam* 27.9

The appeal of this canto in *Tiruvacagam*, which constitutes the eighth *Tirumurai* of the sacred collections, lies in its spiritual realisation of the divine-human Bi-Unity. The *Periyapuranam* highlights this salient principle of indissoluble inter-relatedness of the *anma* (soul) with the Para-Sivam in the life-history of the sixty-three Saiva Seers.

The Eternity of Mythic Elements in the Tirumurais

The vision of Truth that is articulated in the sacred anthology of the *Tirumurais* is an interplay of indigenous culture with that of Aryan culture. The Saiva Nayanmars were great integrators of Vedic, Agamic, Puranic and devotional pathways. They utilised Aryan and Tamil imagery in their compositions to inspire the Saiva fold with visual representations of Siva and incorporated ancient mythological representations with anthropocentric and nature-oriented settings and human relationships to express the seekers' devotion to Siva. His mythic exploits were freely expressed to enhance His all-pervasive, all-powerful and gracious aspects. The *puranas* represent an interpretation of the sacred texts revealing immutable Truth in comprehensible form to man in his changing and historical situations.

We should take note of the diversity of the strands that have been fed into the unitive vision of the Saiva Seers. At no stage can we afford to forget the world of Smṛti, classical Hindu Puranas and Agamas steeped in the intrinsic authority of the Śruti—the revealed word. The twelve *Tirumurais* represent an amalgam of different, but not separate oral traditions. The many battles that Lord Siva waged against the Asuras are simply allegories for the combats in which every individual participates between true power and hostile forces.

The functional role of the *Periyapuranam* emphasises its impact on the lives of the Saivites. The focus is not on the context of the text. It is revered and transmitted, independent of its subject-matter. Ritualism pervading mythical accounts

forms an integral part of the Agamic tradition. Hymns of praise are woven by the creative genius of the Saiva saints with references to Siva's feats of heroism, and a kind of synthetic appeal emerges from the liturgy of the *Tirumurais*. Insights into the use of mythic epithets, formulae and repetition in the refrains and similes bring out the beauty and transcendental quality of the Saiva Tirumurais of sacred songs.

Nirguna (formless) Sivam can take a thousand names, which are expressive of purposive and meaningful characteristics and which often reflect historical, legendary or mythological events. An understanding of the imprints of the psycho-linguistic background and mythic structures becomes absolutely essential to a profound study of the *Periyapuranam*. Thus Vedic and Agamic resonances common to Hindu tradition have perpetuated the integral vision of Truth as One and Supreme Reality.

The Saiva Seers showed the way to move beyond the external forms and ceremonies to the inwardly eternal One. Their religious fervour resolved all infra-community differences and the unifying vision of Siva was glorified in their sacred songs. All these resources were made available to the people at large and helped in expanding the knowledge and understanding of the Saiva practices and beliefs. The servitors of Siva by their poetic compositions, music and plays familiarised the masses with the heroic exploits of Siva. After *Tripura Samhara*, the destruction of the three fortresses of the Asuras, Siva's dance of victory radiated the flames from his darts and destroyed all evil. In the "*atta Virattanam*", Siva's martial dances as Gangadhara, Gajantaka, etc. are fused with the concept of the Dancing Siva.

The unity of the central theme of Siva-Realisation revolves round the guru who guides the aspirants through different pathways to the blessedness of "Sivabhogam and Sivanandam"—bliss ineffable. In their unitive experiences of becoming one with Him, and seeing the unity of all things in Siva, the Nayanmars promoted harmonious relationships

with others, which in turn developed virtues of charity, forbearance and tolerance.

We shall take some of the well-known *puranic* myths which figure frequently in their songs sung at local temples. On the understanding of their inner essence lies the pivot, on which hangs the pendulum of the Sanmarga pathway of Saivism. The Sadasiva tattva in the Agamas is represented by the formless form of Siva in lingam, and this image is reflected in the myth of Lingodbhava—the manifestation of form—Sakti or energy from the primordial undifferentiated latency.

Brahma, the Creator is seen on the stalk of the lotus from which he had originated, and which had sprung from the navel of Vishnu, the preserving Deity, who was reposing on the support of Ananta, the serpent in the endless ocean. Brahma goes through the stem to find the bottom of the stalk, but does not find it. Vishnu declares that Brahma was under the delusion of Maya, when he assumed as Creator the overlordship of the Universe, whereas as Sustainer, he was the Superior One and the source of all phenomena. They were disputing thus when there appeared a pillar of light in their midst. As Lingodbhava, Siva is a sthanu or pillar of light revealing His Omniscience, flame of knowledge. They set about to find the beginning and end of this column of light, and decided that whoever finds it would be declared the superior deity.

Brahma took the form of garuda and flew above, while Vishnu in the form of a boar went downward and, not succeeding in their quest, they accepted Siva who appeared as the pillar of fire, the Lord Supreme. His all-pervading immanence moved as the inmost core of every living being. This myth referred to in all the *Tirumurai* collections inculcated the Saiva belief in Lord Siva being the indweller in the temple of the body.

The body is His temple, the mind His servitor,
Worship with love the Indweller with purity and
truth.

—St. Appar

This myth proves the futility of outward religious forms and rites without inner realisation, and that arrogant religious disputations detract the seekers from experiential knowledge of the Lord.

Another of the common *puranic* myths is that of the churning of the ocean of milk. The Devas and the Asuras together churn the ocean of milk (mind) to get the nectar of immortality. They get out of it some wonderful things useful to them, but eventually poison starts accumulating that can destroy everything. The gods and Asuras in bewilderment invoke the help of Lord Siva. He is the physician who swallowed the deadliest poison (*Kalakuta*) and effected wondrous healing.

Spiritual quest should end in communion with Siva and not give rise to the poison of egoity. Siva quaffs the poison, and it turns his throat into a deep blue. He is termed *Tiru-neelakandan*, the saving grace of the lost and ailing humanity. They continue the churning and “amritham” (nectar) emerges as the goal of evolving life, which is the realisation that man is an immortal spiritual essence. This myth is worked out in all its nuances in the soul-stirring ode of St. Sambandar in *Veiuru Tholi Pagan*, sung on the eve of his setting out for Madurai at the request of Queen Mangaiarkarasi to face the challenge of alien creeds there to oust Saiva hegemony. He assures the elder saint Appar that “no harm can ever afflict the votaries of Tiruneelakandan to whom everything is intrinsically good, good and perfectly good.”

These truth-seekers in an infinite variety of ways have guided man to gain experiential knowledge (*Mei-jnanam*) to realise truth and to appreciate goodness and beauty. The

rediscovery of the profound wisdom underlying the concepts of *puranic* myths by the Nayanmars, captains at the helm of the mystery of the inner self, will certainly help everyone to achieve the liberating freedom of *being*, and thus expand to newer and higher dimensions of Truth. The transforming power of these myths cited in the *Tirumurais* expands the understanding of the nature and essence of God in His manifestations among ordinary common folk.

Siva effects the liberation of souls out of the evolution of the thirty-six categories of existence (*tattvas*) necessary for the origination and protection of all living beings. The dynamic image of Sri Nataraja as the Lord of the Cosmic Dance represents symbolically Siva's fivefold activities known as *Panchakritya*—creation, preservation, dissolution, veiling and "Anugraha" (grace). The Dance of Siva brings out the efficacious charm of symbolism worked out so intrinsically in the twelve sacred anthologies of Saivite hymns. The *Panchakritya* enacted in the Dance of Siva, whose symbols of fire and drum, and His trampling the innate ego-bound *Muyalakan*, His smiling face and uplifted leg of grace accentuate life as a process, a journey.

The concept of Sri Nataraja unfolds the mystery of Siva's transcendence and immanence, and His worship through dance, drama and music has become a powerful force in Saivism. St. Appar exclaims in *Koyil Tiruvirutham* decad 3.1 that, having seen the uplifted foot of Sri Nataraja at the Chidambaram temple, there is nothing else to be seen. The devotees—"Peythondar"—who witnessed His Dance at the golden hall are like madmen, babes and disembodied spirits, having lost their ego-self and veiling impurity, and there is nothing else so priceless for them to see any more. In short, there is nothing beyond the vision of Truth.

Lord Siva fills the universe of the sun, the moon and the five elements and the Dance of Siva is the dance of evolution and involution. The moon-crescent typifies self-sacrifice.

Siva is depicted as the destroyer of the God of Death who is *Kala* (Time), and *Kama* who is unholy desire and lust. He, however, rejuvenates them graciously by the streaming ganga and the crescent on his matted locks, signifying the eternal march of time. The "Chandrakalas" remove the fear of death and annihilation. He is destroyer and benign Lord in one. All is transmutation and the Dance reflects His grace in eliminating all destructive forces and transforming these elements into new cycles of existence.

In the Dance of Siva, cosmic energy is visualised in the form of Nataraja who enacts the fivefold activities in the macrocosm and microcosm. The Dance symbolises truth and beauty; movement and change; time and eternity. The Lord of Thillai is a representation of the divine as Creator, Sustainer, Destroyer, transmuting and rejuvenating in immeasurable grace. The Dance typifies the vision of the Supreme Parasivam, dancing in bliss in the *chid-ambaram*, the *akasha* of the heart, thereby restoring the perfect equilibrium of the cosmos. The absolute unmoved Mover is the foundation of all existence and bestows energy on all cosmic movements. It is the inner secret of all, being the *core*, and it is also the outer "noosphere" existing all around.

The religious experiences of the Nayanmars in particular and of all Saivites generally can only be understood fully in the context of the true import of the myths and symbols conveyed in the sacred Texts. The essence of these myths conveys the right background to our penetration of the Truth that is Siva. The patterns of behaviour of St. Kannappan, the hunter, who plucked his eye to replace the bleeding eye of the image of Siva at Kalahasti temple, of Sakkia Nayanar who threw stones as offerings of worship at the image of Siva, and Tirunalaipovar's determination to visit Chidambaram and worship the Lord of Dance must be evaluated in the foreground of these Agamic beliefs and mythical assumptions.

Sekiller resorted to moral and intuitive approaches, befitting the various types of seekers and servitors. He re-vivified Saiva truths through *puranic* sources and Agamic resources and clarified them from within in the language of the people. In this way was unravelled the mystery of the One and the Many—Siva as the centrifugal point of Reality on whom all other entities depend and who takes innumerable names and forms in the world of plurality.

He Himself is One; His grace is second (Siva and Sakti)

He is the three; He is witnessed in all the four;

The five He conquered; the six He filled;

The seven He pervades; the eight He manifests.

—St. Appar, *Tiruthandakam*

In this perspective should be reviewed the heroic feats of Siva contained in the myth of *Atta-Virattanam*, wherein He combats the adverse forces that hinder the soul's liberation—Siva triumphed over Dhaksha, the son of Brahmā, who invited all the gods except Siva to the great sacrifice to assert his importance; also the Asura Andhaka who harassed the Devas, the demon Jalandhara who plundered the wealth of the Devas and the arrogant "Three" who ruled the infamous three cities, signifying the threefold impurities of pride and egoism, delusion and the effects of self-motivated deeds. There were the exploits of Siva with the passionate elephant, Gajasura, who was sent by the infatuated ascetics of Tarakavanam to attack the mendicant sage who was none other than Siva, and who vanquished the elephant and donned his hide. The elephant is ignorance and passion, and Siva destroys the delusion and bestows true knowledge. Inner obstructions are cleared when man experiences the fleeting and impermanent nature of existence; and the awakening to this truth of transience strengthens the common allegiance of fellow-beings to the gracious Siva who removes man's imperfections by His saving grace.

Then followed Siva's vanquishing of *Kaalan*, the God of Death, who threatened to take prematurely the life of Maikandeyar, a devout Saiva devotee who sought refuge at His Feet. He opened His third Eye and exterminated Kaman, the archer of lust who tried his arrogant presumptions to allure Him. Thus we see the interconnectedness of Siva's eightfold heroic deeds with the revealing grace to erring humanity. They signify the *Tirodhana* or obscuring phase of His fivefold cosmic activity and the final bestowal of the grace of love.

There is just this distinction that in the Vedic cult, mythical forms and images figure largely in meditation, while in the Agamas, they are referred to as forms of worship for the attainment of Siva-Realisation. St. Sekillar, true to the Saiva tradition followed by the Nayanmars, considers them as saving acts and forms of grace. The yogic insights provided by the Saiva myths enabled devotees to imbibe deeper meanings from these outward practices of temple worship, fasts and vigils. They experienced the underlying unity which integrates different levels of consciousness and grades of worshippers and different forms of worship in sustaining their devotion. Siva's grace is at work in all the stages of the evolution of man to the final return to the source. We perceive in these myths the inter-relations and interactions of the Saivite Hindus with Siva and His gracious Energy and with the objective world and fellow-beings.

We discern that through the bifocal lens of devotion and knowledge (Bhakti and Jnanam), St. Sekillar mediates the truth of the Many becoming One, and the One in the Many in his magnum opus, the *Periyapuranam*. The essence of myths and symbols converges in the grandeur of *Sivanandam* — Bliss Infinite.





PERIYAPURANAM

A STUDY IN SAIVA-CULTURE

A TRADITIONAL social order like that of Dravida India is not a haphazard development, but imitative of values which are understood to have been revealed and of which the truth is taken for granted. A critical study of Tamil literature would certainly be held as a prerequisite for conducting South Indian antiquarian research.

Our primary purpose is to analyse the significant trends gleaned from the monumental classic of the *Periyapuranam*, which surveys the history of Tamil culture through the lives of the sixty-three saints. Some of them lived before the dawn of history and some others followed the Third Academy of Letters at Madurai from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D. The majority of them followed in the trail of St. Tirujnana Sambandar and St. Tirunavukarasar from the seventh century down to the end of the twelfth century A.D.

Institutions represent an application of metaphysical dotrines to contingent circumstances and take on a local colour, changing with the times, but maintaining throughout a high degree of stability. The existing order preserves a recognizable identity and produces concord from order. In the traditional society of the Tamils, the people came to respect established institutions like that of the monarchy and vocational guilds, and spiritual authority over temporal power, so that any *reformation* implied a *return* to some form, from which deviation had taken place.

Every established social order has a metaphysical *raison d'être*. Morality is a matter of correct procedure, a matter of knowing what to do, rather than of feeling.

That which is hard to achieve, the great man will strive after, while hard work, hard in the doing, the lazy ones will ignore.

—Kural 3.6

Historical Background

Where the cosmic pattern of good form is accepted, public opinion controls the whole situation. No custom can be defied or changed, unless the *metaphysic* can first be shown to be at fault. One cannot recoil from war by mere argument, but by basing it on the *concept of man* not as an economic tool, but as one with spiritually determined nature and consequent way of life. It is not enough to desire peace, but desire the things that make for peace.

There is a general tendency to attack institutions like the caste system, without first finding out its original intentions, and whether these intentions, which are based on fundamental social norms, by which Tamil society regulates its moral order, are likely to be realised by the new institutions proposed in its place from outside.

The traditional society of the Tamils, as seen from their classical literary and sacred texts is a closely-woven texture, and if one of its threads is pulled cut, it is likely to become a tangle, so that the best in Tamil culture should not be haphazardly integrated with the best in alien cultures under a common name.

Certainly we can help one another to do better what each has already been trying to do. To demand of the other to change is to destroy his morale. Thus the social system of the Tamils must be known, explained and appreciated but not amalgamated. The time is opportune to review the

patterns of the existing social order of the Tamils. The moral order must be critically examined from its origins as something sanctified by divine sanction or introduced into human life under description of natural laws as that of our Dharma Sastras. It is revealed in the great Saiva *puranas*—*Tiruvila-yadal* and the *Periyapuranam*—that Saiva morality of the Tamils is a “way of life”, Sanmarga. It becomes evident in particular significant situations where self-denying, self-effacing love forms the major criterion.

The Social and Moral Order

We shall survey the lives of the sixty-three Saiva—Tamil saints—and see how the *concept of morals derives from the concept of Love, an ultimate deep down reality*. The Saiva saints did not lay down a code of laws, and neither did Sekillar, the author of the *Periyapuranam*, attempt to codify the rules of conduct. After an intense study of the lives of these saints, we are not in a position to produce a list of things which are right and things which are wrong to be accepted as a universal code.

Sekillar has portrayed a variety of meaningful incidents of saintly conduct. He has dealt with moral questions in the context of a typical Saivite's motive and vocation. One of the well-known Saiva saints, St. Kannappar, had demonstrated what was for *him*, with his background and condition, the way of life. He was not guided to see what was in the list of things always right and things always wrong.

In the life of St. Sundaramurti, who was the author of the *Tiru-Thondath Thogai*, which eventually gave rise to the *Periyapuranam*, there are many instances to prove that motives rather than rules, Love's implications rather than Law prevailed in the Golden Age of the Tamil-Saiva culture to judge Saiva morality. It is noteworthy to see in the records of these saints celebrated in the *Periyapuranam*, the significance of divine institutions within the natural order, such as brahmacharya, marriage, family, community and the State.

There is a growing need today, when vital issues in the life of the community have become too unbalanced and confused, to re-examine the social order of the Tamils and revitalize it. The values derived in depth from the Saiva tradition as, for instance, that justice must follow the same canons for a king's son as for the cow, and all the lowliest creatures of his state, and that any type of promise once made should be honoured, prove that Love which fulfils the Law does not supersede the Law; it gives the profoundest meaning to life. It was on this fundamental concept of Love that the *Periyapuranam* justifies the code of life that nothing of itself can be labelled as false or incorrect—"Oru pollaapumillai". There cannot be anything that can be considered intrinsically wrong.

Today there is a pressing need to evaluate the profound issues facing Saivite life in terms of love. Modern Saivites will find in the *Periyapuranam* the heart of the matter. People assume too easily that faith may be taken for granted, and at best needs only to be stated and commended. Saiva tradition affirms that faith can be commended only in terms of its fulfilment in the lives of men who have shown the Saivite way. The way of Saiva-Neethi is commended only in so far as the Saivites are equipped to put themselves with loving sympathy inside the doubts of the doubting, the questions of the questioners, and the loneliness of those who have lost their way.

The Saivites have borne shocks without finding them wholly destructive. The lives of the Saiva seers testify to the fact that they had confronted fearlessly opposing factions and sects and resolved conflicts with the armour of faith and purity. The moving cantos of St. Appar prove the victory of a life of supreme faith. It has been a characteristic of Saiva-Tamil culture to adapt and adopt attitudes of conduct relevant to the times from episodes of human actions and reactions, failures and successes and thus accommodate to new situations in life.

The study of the special patterns of living of the Saivites as gleaned from the *Periyapuranam* will stimulate the modern Saivite, wherever he is and whatever work he is called upon to do to revivify his old faith in the new setting of the nuclear age. As Dante has stated in his *Epistolae X*: "That as a thing is related to truth, the reason of which is, that the truth about a thing is a perfect likeness of the thing as it is." Moreover if we have no knowledge of the *part*, we can never understand the *whole*. Therefore, in any introduction to a work of art it is essential to furnish some knowledge of the whole of which it is a part, so that the approach to the part should be the easier and more complete.

The *Periyapuranam* must be interpreted after a study of it from various angles, for it is one facet which we get through the letter, and another which we get through that which the letter signifies. The first is called *literal* and does not come within the purview of our study, while the second is called *substantial* or *content* which takes in the social and the moral sense as well.

The subject of the *Periyapuranam* deals with the relationship of God Siva and man, and elucidates the lives of the sixty-three Saiva saints of South India in their historic, social and religious settings. These are the servitors of God Siva and man. They are the minstrels of peace who moved on foot, traversing every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. In their daily encounter of person with person, they shared with them the still sad music of humanity and upheld the 'give and take', the 'live and let live' norms of the Saiva pathway in the background of peace and war.





THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE VOTARIES OF SIVA

THE sacred canzones composed by the Tamil-Saiva Elect (Tiru Thondar), whose lives and works are extolled in the *Periyapuranam* are known as sacred collections or *Tirumurais*. These were compiled by Nambiandar Nambi into eleven anthologies in the reign of Rajaraja Abhaya Kulasekara, the Chola king of the tenth century A.D. Rajaraja Chola I ascended the throne in 984 A.D.

The Basic Struture of the Twelve Anthologies :

The hymns of St. Tirujnana Sambandar who lived in the beginning of the seventh century formed the first three anthologies of the *Tirumurais*, while his contemporary was St. Tirunavukarasu, also known as Appar Swamy. His compositions and song-offerings form the next three series of the *Tirumurais*. This was followed by the seventh series of sacred cantos sung by St. Sundaramurti, the coordinating force of the *Periyapuranam*. These seven series of compositions comprise a class of lyrical poetry known as *Thevaram*—exalted cantos of adoration and supplication on Siva in his immanent and transcendent aspects. They are also called the Tamil-Saiva Vedas.

The *Tiruvacagam* formed the eighth anthology of the *Tirumurais* and was composed by St. Manicavasagar. This garland of verse is unsurpassed in profundity of thought and excellence of expression, where the struggling human soul finds through the eternal grace of Siva, the shelter of His Feet. The ninth collection of metaphysical poems by nine authors came to be known as *Tiru-Isaippa*. The tenth collection

contained the mystic garland of poems known as the *Tirumantiram*. It is a classic work based on Saiva Agamic tenets and practices. It was composed by St. Tirumular who, it is believed, lived during the dark age of Tamil history after the Golden Age of the First, Second and Third Academies of Tamil Letters and before the Thevaram poets. It was a chaotic period when the Tamil land was overrun by various power groups and religious sects. The *Tirumantiram* proved useful for the clear enunciation and coordination of the doctrine and method of Suddha-Advaita Saivam.

The eleventh anthology embraced a number of sacred poems by several authors, ranging from Nakirar who was the poet laureate of the Third Academy of Letters at the beginning of the first century A.D., to Avvayar and other devout poets to Pattinattar and Nambi Andar Nambi of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The latter was the author of the compilation known as *Tiru Thondar Anthathi* which also formed another source reference for Sekillar's *Periyapuranam*, which comprised the twelfth and last collection of sacred poems entitled the *Saiva Tirumurais*. "Tamil writers," says Dr. Caldwell, "hide their individuality in the shade of their writings." Individual greatness was considered worthless, and if a book was good, people admired it and did not care whether God or man wrote it, or when he wrote it.

The works of Umapathy Sivachariar, the author of eight of the fourteen Siddhanta Sastras—metaphysical treatises on Saiva religion, date from the early fourteenth century and he gives the date of composition of the *Sankalpa Nirakaranam*, a Saiva metaphysical dissertation, as 1313 A.D. Therefore he must have written his study of Sekillar and his *Periyapuranam* entitled *Tiruthondar Purana Varalaru* about this time. There was some distance of time between his work and that of Sekillar, the author of the *Periyapuranam* whom he reveres as a canonised saint.

The Chola king under whose patronage Sekillar wrote the *Periyapuranam* was Anapaya Chola Pallava, well-known in Tamil literature as Tiruneeru Chola to indicate perhaps his piety. He embellished the Sri Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with a gold dome.

An Anthology of Timeless Stories of the Pathfinders

The biographies of the spiritual heroes and heroines in India deviated from the epic form and came to be known as *puranas*. These narratives dealt exclusively with religious themes and were connected with the lives of these exemplary seers, whose deeds were characterised by loyalty to truth, selfless love and sacrifice for the good of fellow-beings. Like the chronicles of the *Old Testament* of the Hebrews or the *Mahavamsa* of the Buddhists, the *puranas* too narrate the history of the land and its people. Accounts of the dynasties of kings and sages, the common man's vocations and their code of living and obligations, their laws and customs, places of worship and seats of learning are woven round the life of a saint, who by virtue of his wisdom and impact on community life had come to be recognised as a votary of Truth, a typical *meiadiyar*. St. Sundarar who glorifies the legion of the votaries of Truth styles himself as the humblest bondsman of these servitors of Siva—"Adiyaarkum Adiyar".

Thus the term *Puranam* implied that it dealt with traditional values and standards and connoted an "anthology of esteemed and timeless stories". In Sekillar's *Tiru Thondar Puranam*, known popularly as the *Periyapuranam*, the term *Tiru Thondar* signifies that the stories deal with sanctified saints or servitors of Siva. They came to be known as Siva-Thondar or "Mei Thondar". The Saiva galaxy of saints faithfully pursued the well-defined fourfold pathways enjoined in the Saiva scriptures and Agamas. The first is *Sariyai*, the way to Siva-realisation through dedicated physical activity. It implies all work as service to the Lord. The

next is *Kriyai*, the way of mental worship and conformity to accepted moral codes, and the next stage is the path of *Yoga*. Here, all action is yoked to inner discipline. Lastly is *Jnana*, the accomplished way of the wise. Through self-knowledge and the guru's grace, man becomes established in truth and dharma.

Acquiring the knowledge of the arts,
Treading the path of true yoga,
Graduating in the triple path of Jnanam,
And enkindled with purity inside and out,
The Saiva Seers experience *Tatparam*,
The infinitude of transcendental *para-param*.

—*Tirumantiram* 1042

Sekillar's *Periyapuranam* has immortalised the lives and works of the illustrious Saiva saints, who were remembered for centuries by oral tradition. They testified for all ages, to the ineffable love of Siva and its munificence and magnitude. Their impact on the Saiva world is magnetic even today. They were called *Nayanmar*, which word signified those who show the way.

Be endowed with love to all living beings
For Siva abides inseparably in all living beings.

This was their message :

Evuyirum neenkaathu Uraiyum Irai Sivan entru
Evuyirkum anpaai iru

—Saiva Samaya-Neri

Their biographies, spiritual struggles and victories, the true nature of the supreme goal of man, the transcendent glory of the Godhead manifested in the temples, Siva's revelations and acts of grace—these in short form the main thesis of Sekillar's monumental masterpiece, the *Periyapuranam*.

We listen to its vibrant call, relevant today as in the bygone days :

Nam seiya! attintha naamattapin naathan
Than seiya! thaane entru unthipara
Thannaiye thanthaan entru unthipara.

I am not the doer of deeds
 Ego thus eliminating,
 Consider all deeds as the Lord's deeds—
 Thus moved by His Will, Unthipara
 Himself, He has given, Unthipara.

—*Tiruvunthiyar* 1.6

The Prelude to Periyapuranam

The Nayanmars enjoyed a common unifying factor, which was their steadfast and unsullied love in the service of Siva. What inspired devotion in them was the *indwelling presence of Infinite Sivam*. These saints sought to match the infinitude of the Lord by the perfect surrender of their lives at His Feet with immeasurable love, as revealed in the lives of St. Kannappar, St. Pusalar, Chandeswar, Karaikal Ammaiyar, St. Sambandar, St. Sundarar, St. Appar and many others.

The *Periyapuranam* consists of a concise preface followed by twelve Kaandams or sections. Each section is again subdivided into cantos. The first Kaandam has two parts. Part I describes the Sacred Hill—*Tirumalai Sarukkam*—the country, the town, the sacred community and the life of St. Sundarar up to his consecration. Part II consists of the story of the high Brahmin priests of Thillai and describes in seven cantos, the “Initiates of Thillai”, and the lives of saints called St. Tiruneelakandar, St. Iyanpakainayanar, St. Illaiyankudimaran, St. Meiporunayanar, St. Viramindanayanar and St. Amarnethinayanar. The remaining Kaandams take up the hagiography of rest of the sixty-three Nayanmars.

Each of the cantica is again subdivided into specified stanzas, and each stanza is composed of either four lines or eight lines. The method of treatment is poetic, descriptive, digressive, transumptive and proceeds by definition, division, proof, refutation and setting forth of examples.

The preface to the poem consists of a prefatory enunciation, commonly called an exordium calculated to prepare the mind of the hearer, and the author does this after the Invocation. The opening cantos render the readers benevolent, attentive and tractable. Since the content of the work is "marvellous", the intention at the beginning of the exordium is to stimulate these dispositions in connection with the marvellous. This classic is written in Virutham metre, the most sonorous according to Tamil Poetics :

The all-embracing lofty Epic is written in Virutham metre.

The whole *puranam* is full of clarity and sweetness, both in diction and in thought.

The Author of Periyapuranam, St. Sekillar

In Thondai Nadu lived a clan of people called Vellalar, whose hospitable and magnanimous nature was well-known to all. Their districts were twenty-four out of which Puliur district comprised five circuits known as Kunrathur, Perur, Mankadu, Pammal and Kottur. Sekillar, the author of the great *Puranam*, was born in the early eleventh century at Kunrathur and named Arunmozhitheva. He had a brother called Paalaravayar. His intelligence and scholarship came to be widely known and King Anapaya Chola appointed him as a minister of state and gave him the title of Uttama-Chola Pallava.

Sekillar worshipped with fervent piety Lord Siva at the temple of Tirunaheswaram. This was the period of history when the popular Tamil literary works composed by the Jain and Buddhist authors were greatly influencing the masses. Even the royalty encouraged the spread of these classics,

especially the epic of *Jivaka Chintamani*. The minister of state Sekillar sought to impress on the king the cultural attainments and spiritual advancement of the Saiva elect called Nayanmars. He related to the king opportunely the lives and works of these Saiva saints.

The king was so greatly impressed that he instructed his able minister to collect and publish the writings and cantos sung by these servitors of Siva. Sekillar took up the research work of writing their lives in a narrative epic called *Tiru-Thondar Puranam*, which later came to be known as the immense *puranam* or the *Periyapuranam*. As Sekillar required the peace and sanctity of a holy place to carry out the project, he was given permission to live in the holy city of Thillai and execute the literary work under the inspiration of the Lord of the Cosmic Dance, Nataraja.

When this *Puranam* consisting of thirteen sections of 4, 286 cantos was completed, King Anapaya Chola, his officers of state and high priests of the temple assembled and listened to the exposition of the whole epic by the dedicated author. After a most touching consecration ceremony in Chidambaram, Sekillar, the author, was highly honoured by the king. Thereafter it was ordained that this magnum opus called the *Tiru-Thondar Puranam* or *Periyapuranam* consisting of an account of the lives and works of the sixty-three Saiva saints should be included in the *Tirumurai* collection of the Saivite canonical texts. This ordination was inscribed on copper plates along with the others and the eleven sacred books were preserved at the Chidambaram temple of Sri Nataraja.

The whole episode reads like a fairy tale, but it is a historical fact and it bears testimony to the efflorescence of Saiva-Tamil culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the heyday of the noble Chola kings, who placed religious welfare far above temporal power. The Chola kings worked zealously for the spiritual revival and cultural upliftment of their subjects. It was a benevolent monarchy where people

lived in harmony with each other and where Saiva-Neethi—"Pax Tamilica" flourished.

The Thondai Nadu ruled by the Chola kings is described by the author of the *Periyapuranam* as a welfare state which conformed to the tenets of Saiva Dharma, because of the single-minded devotion of the people to Lord Siva. Siva's compassionate appellation "Neelakanthan", who quaffed the poison arising from the sea of milk in order to save the Devas and Asuras from destruction, signified His ineffable grace. Sekillar was a true representative of this territory and the Vellala community.

The inhabitants of Thondai Nadu were a
distinguished lot

Who espoused a life of piety and purity

And lived in an exalted state, upholding

The ideal of moral excellence in the world.

The community of farmers was noted for their industry, ethical excellence, fortitude and integrity. Their one remarkable trait was hospitality and they were noted for their charitable deeds for the needy and the poor. It was the belief that the mother of Dharma, Sri Kamakshi of Kanchi had blessed this community to cultivate the land to its maximum productivity and produce foodgrains for distribution on the basis of need.

In this country, there was a council of seventy magistrates who at some early period of history sat in judgement on a certain woman called Neeli and her paramour. When they realised their error in sentencing Neeli's paramour to death, they gave up their lives voluntarily in an Agni-Yajna at Tiruvalankadu. So great was their sense of justice and fairplay. The Vellalar community maintained their proud inheritance of integrity in all matters that they were sought

after by the rulers to fill responsible positions as administrators and commanders of the army in various parts of Tamil Nadu. Among the sixty-three elect called Nayanmars, besides the author Sekillar, thirteen are from this Vellalar community. Kodpulinayanar, Kalipahainayanar, Kalikamar, Manakanjanar were all generals in the armed forces of kings. Their outstanding and distinctive trait was "their loving servitude to Siva:"

As the sons and heirs of the magnanimous Mother of
Kanchi,

They produced maximum output of paddy and
foodgrains

And distributed (them) to the fellow citizens with
benevolent well-being.

St. Sekillar, the illustrious chief minister of King Anapaya Chola and renowned author of the *Periyapuranam*, was an exemplary torch-bearer of the Vellala community of farmers, whom he portrays as custodians of honesty, rectitude, righteousness and munificence. St. Sekillar was indeed a great lover of nature and a man who revelled in the divine-human symphony. He will be remembered as an ardent servitor of Siva.





NEW AVENUES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

THE life-stories and religious experiences of the sixty-three Nayanmars recounted in the *Periyapuranam* have become well-known among the common people as well as scholars interested in the study of the Saiva religion. Very few studies have been made to explore, understand and evaluate their religious experiences in the context of Revelation or of the Saiva tradition and Muttamil cultural values. An aesthetico-metaphysical approach to apprehend the Reality underlying their stirring experiences would prove most fruitful.

The Nayanmars in their moving cantos comprising the eleven *Tirumurais*, and Sekillar in his hagiography of the *Periyapuranam* which is cited as the twelfth *Tirumurai*—holy anthology of sacred poems—have expressed their communication in conceptual and mythical garb. The deep insights which these minstrels of Siva arrive at are the result of reflection upon the inarticulate experience gained at the moment of supreme awareness. These experiences go beyond the limit of time and space, mind and matter, human nature and language or common sense. The progress is from the gross to the subtle, from the finite to the infinite. It is a kind of luminous awakening.

Experiences are said to originate from above, within and without. The grace of Siva works from above as in the case of St. Sambandar being fed by the divine milk of the consort of Siva. The experiences of St. Appar and most of the bhaktanayanmars spring by reflectively turning towards the self within. There is another kind of experience that originates

from the beauty of the world without, the beauty of nature and the beauty of the many-faceted temples, to gaze into the heart of things as testified to in the experiences of St. Tirumular and St. Sundarar. "All that they perceived externally in diversity was essentially one."

In the *Periyapuranam* aesthetic experience merges into the religious and mystic experience. It is the absorption of the subject in the aesthetic object—the bard Aaruran before the Lord of Aarur—raising himself above the stream of everyday life, where the laws of cause and effect do not operate.

To the call of Thy bondsman, bound to Thee alone,
Not seeking any other, like smouldering flame within,
If you remain silent, what then ?
O Lord of Tiruarur, be Thou prosperous.

—St. Sundarar

On the level of the senses and imagination, the lesser Nayanmars like Namināndi, Somaasi maran, Athipathar, Vaoyilaan and Seruthunai display feelings of love, pathos, heroism, humour, anger, terror, wonder, disgust and repose. These rasas or sentiments are accompanied by a sense of joy, and releases a kind of blissful consciousness.

The highest religious experiences are born in the transcendental level of subjectivity, in the supra-conceptual centre of the soul. In the Cantos sung by the "Three Elect" in praise of the hallowed Name of Siva, termed "Namasivaya Decad", we discover a centre of experience which is the climax of intuition. Their experience came from the power of integration, and from this depth arose expressions which were mainly in the form of symbols and analogies. They were in intimate touch with Reality without being obstructed by the grossness of the material world. These seers enlivened the words and charged them with symbolic

meanings. In the Cantos sung by these Peers of peerless Siva, when they raised the dead maiden Pōm-pavai or vanquished the mad elephant set upon them or made the crocodile disgorge the digested boy alive—we see intuited Reality at its maximum crescendo.

The *Periyapuranam* is an inestimable hagiography of the seers of Truth. They are sixty-three in number and together with the collective congregation of nine form the grand assembly of self-realised seers. Sundara Murti Nayanar in the seventh *Tirumurai* cantos communicated the truth of Siva's Presence everywhere, and assured sceptics that no one however humble and lowly in the eyes of the world could be put out of sight of the Supreme Presence, in his famous decad of *Tiru Thondth Thogai*, the lay of the holy servitors of Siva. This formed the source for the compilation of the *Periyapuranam* by Sekillar, three centuries later. Every one of the Nayanmars adoted by St. Sundarar is extolled in the *Periyapuranam* as having revolved in the luminosity of direct perception where the seer alone is "pratyaksha"—real and eternal. Some of the unrealistic acts of the Nayanmar, as that of parting with a loving wife to an ascetic's response, or entertaining a devotee of Siva and appeasing his hunger with a sumptuous meal while the son lay collapsed after a snake-bite, appear strange to modern readers who view these acts from the objective plane. To a realised man of God what is seen is not real, but the seer who sees the Vision is the Real—Pratyaksha.

St. Sundarar's—TIRU-THONDATH THOGAI—The Ballad Royal on the Servitors of Siva

The Ballad on the servitors of Siva by St. Sundara Murti Nayanar constitutes the source of the *Periyapuranam*. *Adiyaarkum Adiyen* is the significant refrain in this magnificent on the Truth-seekers of Siva. *Adiyen* signifies one who prostrates at the Holy Feet of Siva, implying thereby his worshipful attitude to all the servitors of Siva who are termed *Adiyaar*.

Adi symbolises divine grace, the energising power of Siva and *Adiyen* connotes the lowly and loving submission of a seeker to the Divine Will of Siva. Here we witness the intense devotion and humble surrender of St. Sundarar to Lord Siva, addressing Him as the God of Tiru-Aarur, and his participation in His immeasurable grace by his vow of servitude to the Lord's servitors.

TIRU-THONDATH THOGAI :

The Ballad Royal on the Servitors of Siva

To the Antanar of Thillai's servitors, I prostrate.

To the potter, Tiruneelakandan, I prostrate.

To the self-denying Iyatpapai, I prostrate.

To the servitors of Ilayaankudi maran, I prostrate.

To the indomitable Meiporul, I prostrate.

To the native of Kunttraiyur, Viranmindar,
I prostrate.

To the worshipful Amarneethi, I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 1

To Eripathar, the lover of the Vel God, I prostrate.

To the servitors of Enaathi Naathan, I prostrate.

To the lover of the great One, Kannappar, I prostrate.

To the servitor of Kadvur, Kalayanar, I prostrate.

To the magnanimous and valiant Maanakanjaran,
I prostrate.

To the servitor Vaadaayar of invincible faith,
I prostrate.

To the shepherd Aanaayan, dear to Uma's Lord,
I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 2

To Murthi with the triple insignia of Siva, I prostrate.

To Murugan and Rudra Pasupati, I prostrate.

To Tirunaalaipovaar of high rectitude, I prostrate.

To the servitors of Tirukuriputhondar, I prostrate.
To Sandiperuman, who in the act of worshipping
The God of Truth struck the tormenting father
With the hatchet hurled by the divine mother,
I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 3

To the servitors of Tirunaavukarasu,
Whose enlightened goal was the sublime Being,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of the great Kulachirayaan,
I prostrate.

To the Kurumbar of Mihalai and to Peyaar,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of the worthy Apoothi, I prostrate.

To Neelanakat of fertile Sathamangai, I prostrate.

To the servitors of the dear Naminandi, I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 4

To the servitors of the Godly Sambandan
Who adored none but the Lord of fragrant Feet,
Who wore the fresh garland of Kortrai blooms,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of Eyarkon Kalikaaman, I prostrate.
To the servitors of the divine Tirumular, I prostrate.
To the yearning Thandi and Mookar, I prostrate.
To Somaasi maran of Ambar, I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 5

To Saakiar who cast a stone in ever remembrance
Of the Feet of Siva with Uma by His side, I prostrate.
To the generous and illustrious Sivapuli, I prostrate.
To Siruthondar of Sengattankudi, I prostrate.
To Kazharit-Arivar of charitable disposition,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of Gananathan of sea-girt Kazhi,
I prostrate.

To the lance-armed chieftain Kootran of Kalanthai,
I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 6

To the Pulavar of true servitude, I prostrate.

To Pugalcholar who laid his life at Karuvur,
I prostrate.

To Narasimha munayar, the true devotee, I prostrate.

To Athipathar of Naagai lapped by waves,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of the archer, Kalikanban,
Who cut the arm of his wife and to Kiliyan,
I prostrate.

To the victorious Satthi, the King of Varinjaiyur,
I prostrate.

To the servitors of Aiyadigal—Kaadavarkon,
I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 7

To Kanalpullar whose refuge was the Feet
Of the blue-throated God and to Kaar, I prostrate.

To the servitors of the illustrious Nedumaaran

The victor of Nelveli in a just cause, I prostrate.

To the servitors of Vaayilaan of ancient Mayilai,
Where the crimson corals on the seacoast dispel
darkness, I prostrate.

To the warrior with the seasoned lance,
Munaiaduvaar, I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman of the God of Aarur. 8

To the servitors of the King of Kaadavars,
Kazharchingan

Who protects the sea-girt lands, I prostrate.

To the servitors of the brave Idan Kazhi who wears
a garland

Of multi-colours, and Seruthunai, King of Tanjore,
I prostrate.

To Pugazhthunai whose allegiance to the golden Feet
Of the Dancing Lord clad in tiger skin and serpents,
I prostrate.

To the victorious lance-armed Kotpuli. I prostrate.
Aaruran I am, the bondsman to the God of
Aarur. 9

To all the earnest devotees true, I prostrate.
To the servitors of adorable Sivam, I prostrate.
To all who surrender to Sivam, I prostrate.
To all who are born in Tiruvarur, I prostrate.
To the devout Temple Priests who do regular pujai,
I prostrate.
To the Holy Sages who wear Holy Ash, I prostrate.
To the servitors of His Feet, who live in distant places,
I prostrate.

Aaruran I am, the bondsman to the God of
Aarur. 10

To Poosal of Nindravur of Vedic fame, I prostrate.
To the ever charming Maani and Nesan, I prostrate.
To the Pandyan King Chengannaar who ruled the
earth, I prostrate.

To Tiruneelakandathu Paananaar, I prostrate.
Dear is Sadayan who attained the Lord's Feet
Beloved of Isaijnani, the premier citizen of
Tirunaavalur.

Thus rejoices Aaruran and whoever deigns to hear
with delight

Of his servitude shall follow his trail as servitor of
the God of Aarur.

—St. Sundarar 11

This poem of poems was sung by St. Sundarar who calls himself the bondsman of the Lord of Aarur—Aaruran—at the Devasiriyā Hall in the quadrangle of the famous temple at Triruvārur, the one-time capital city of the Chola kings of Tamilakam. St. Sundarar was drawn inwardly by the sight of the congregation of the Mei-Adiyaars—Truth-seekers—who assembled daily in the hall to meditate and discourse on the Lord of Tiruvārur. In this background was born the *Tiru-Thondath Thogai*, the fragrant garland of eleven cantos on the three-and-sixty Saiva servitors. St. Sundarar describes them in succinct epithets and three centuries later, Sekillar elaborates their inconceivable acts of self-surrender and self-sacrifice which amaze us to the limits of incredibility. The power of divine grace that generated within them cured their minds of the pollution of thoughts, changeful and unreal, so that they were not subject to tensions or introspection. In this perspective, Sekillar depicts the moving narratives of these minstrels of God who see the objective world in their subjective consciousness.

The First Canto : Some Explorers of Truth

We shall survey the first canto of St. Sundarar's poem on the servitors of Siva and gain an insight into their lives and acts as narrated by St. Sekillar. First in the list are the twice-born "Antanar", the priestly class of Brahmins who lived in the hallowed city of Thillai—Chidambaram. These dedicated High Priests of Lord Nataraja, the Cosmic Dancer, performed meticulously the Vedic chants and Agamic rites regularly in the Golden Hall of the Thillai temple with great devotion. Hence St. Sundarar pays his humble homage as the lowly servant to these enlightened Brahmins who serve the Lord of Thillai.

Next in order is the potter Tiruneelakandan, who too lived in the city of Chidambaram, famed for its Hall of Wisdom, with his young wife, earning their livelihood by making clay pots and pans. When his wife finds out that he had

transgressed the wedlock pledge of loyalty to her, in his interest for a paramour, she takes a righteous vow, with great self-restraint, citing the name of Siva as Tiruneelakandan—the one who quaffed poison to save the Devas from annihilation—that hereafter both of them should observe the vow of celibacy. The erring husband had to fall in line, and gradually he renounced not only his infatuation for women in general but accepted the sacrifice of conjugal felicity in the home.

The ego, even when it manifests as fidelity or abstinence in the devoted couple, does not enjoy for long the apparent reality. No tranquillisers can ever still the sense of imperfection and no perfume or aromatics can aid the ego-bound soul to know his real self, nor tap the springs of Siva's grace from within. At this stage, the divine intervenes to knock down the innate "anavam", the ego that got elated by the potter's pious fulfilment of celibacy; the ego of self-satisfaction that he is entitled to credit for such a renunciation had also to be given up.

The ordeals start when a visiting ascetic hands the potter his own earthen clay plate for safe custody while he has his purificatory bath in the village tank. Subsequently he asks for it, and to the dismay of Tiruneelakandan, the clay plate was found missing. The renunciate insisted on the potter immersing in the tank and taking an oath, holding the hand of his wife in the process, in order to prove his innocence at the disappearance of his plate. He was offered a new plate which he refused to accept. Even at that stage, Tiruneelakandan, in an effort to observe his secret pledge to his wife not to have any physical contact with her, resorts to holding his wife by means of an intermediate pole, and dips into the tank. When the ascetic objects to this deviation of not holding on to his wife's hand and declaring his innocence, Tiruneelakandan had no other recourse but to declare in public the holy vow taken by his wife in the sacred Name of Siva, as the Lord of the erring ones, the blue-throated Tiruneelakandan who drank poison to save the deluded Devas. How

could he break a holy vow taken in the Name of His Beloved Lord ? Contrite tears for his foibles flowed from his eyes, and his sacrificial devotion struck the onlookers with amazement. The trial only strengthened his love of the Compassionate One, whose name he bore in every fibre of his inner being. The ascetic accepts his innocence and disappears when his devotee's ego was replaced by the knowledge of his being rooted in the True Self of Tiruneelakandan, Siva.

Tiruneelakandan's exaggerated notion of self-respect and elation gives place to the truth of his own self, a free being. The realisation of one's being releases God's power from within. This is the myth underlying the experiences of the Nayanmars being transported in bliss to the domain of Siva. Bliss consists in not forgetting one's being. The seat of love is bliss and perfect knowledge—prajñana. So ends the narrative of the Nayanmar who is cited as the first in the list of the legion of servitors of Siva by St. Sundarar. Siva exalted him to a favoured place in his kingdom and the Devas praised his self-denying staunch devotion and that of his wife.

Next follows Iyatpahai Nayanar. True to his name, he was totally out of tune with the world of fleeting delights. He fixed his liberated mind and gaze on the Supreme Siva in the inmost depth of his being. Domestic felicity was a marked feature of the Hindu way of life and Iyatpahai enjoyed the companionship of a loving and devout wife. Life's vicissitudes overwhelm even persons of exemplary conduct and spirituality. It only brings to the limelight that the world offers both happiness and discord, joy and sorrow, peace and anguish by turns, and the virtuous and non-virtuous experience these pangs.

This Saiva family had made it a golden rule to feed those that hungered and thirsted, whenever they knocked at their doors, as well as showed utmost deference and hospitality to all sadhus and sannyasis, who had renounced worldly ties in order to set up Siva in the domain of their hearts. One

day, when an imposing pilgrim clad with the insignia of holy ash and rudhraksha beads and matted hair turned up to ask a favour of Iyatpahainayanar, he welcomed his guest with due deference. It came to pass that the renunciate made a strange request and asked for his wife ! Even though it seemed an extraordinary alms-giving to a world-detached yogi, Iyatpahaiar acquiesced and gave him permission to take his wife. The stranger further wished that his host should accompany him to the outskirts of the village, so that he was not molested by the villagers for taking his wife away.

So Iyatpahaiar kept company and with remarkable calmness, he returned home after having parted from his loving wife and never did he turn back to have a last look. There was no mesmerism at work. He was free from the thralldom of the senses. The absence of reflection was a sign of grace. Iyatpahaiar vindicated that the feeling of "I and mine" waned before the all-powerful love of Siva to whom belonged everything. The sanctified yogis and tapasvins and Tiruthondars evoked such reverence and esteem from the Saivite fold, that they were venerated as the Form of Siva. In serving a Sivanadiyaar or servitor of Siva, Iyatpahaiar testified to his total surrender and thus realised the bliss of oneness with Siva. He was acclaimed as an incomparable servitor like St. Kannappa Nayanar.

St. Sundarar next sings of the single-hearted devotion of Ilayaankudi maran, a farmer who led an exemplary life with his devoted wife in great affluence. He used the wealth of the produce of his farms in extending his hospitality generously to all who stood in need of his help. Pilgrims, ascetics, the old and the distressed, the hungry and the crippled would be well looked after by him. Gradually he faced landslides and periodic droughts and floods ruined his crops and his harvests failed, so that he found himself in indigent circumstances. Even so, he struggled to continue his service and made great personal sacrifices in order to feed all those recluses and men of renunciation who flocked to him.

In ways inscrutable, he was put to crucial tests and one day, he had to go out in heavy rainfall at night to gather newly-sown paddy in his field and pluck some green leafy vegetables to cook a meal for an aged, hungry sage, who had sought his hospitality at that late hour. His wife who shared in every way his large-hearted willingness to offer the stranger an appetising meal prepared a rice meal and curry and served the hungry pilgrim with great devotion. The saintly sage blessed them with a vision of Siva and by his grace they attained the goal of Siva-realisation. Ilayankudi maran's values did not lie in his possessions or in his actions, but in his insatiable love of Siva. To serve a servitor of Siva is to serve Siva Himself. Here "being" takes precedence over "having". His vision of Siva was tuned to the eternal verities of truth, love and wisdom, and hence St. Sundarar bows to this selfless servitor in recognition of his servitude to fellow-beings as service done to Siva.

St. Tirumular's Insights

Sekillar delineated the Nayanmars as the great integrators of the Muttamil tradition and the Vedic and Agamic pathways. Their goal was the realisation of Siva through the medium of poetry, music, dance and drama. They visited and sang before some two hundred and fifty temples in Tamilakam and gave a new impetus to nature-oriented insights and human relationships in the worship of Siva. Mythic exploits conveyed His majesty, might and benevolence.

St. Tirumular, one of the illustrious Truth-seekers, is described by Sekillar as "Nambiran Tirumulan—our eminent preceptor Tirumulan". He received his divine injunction to compose his Tamil Agama of *Tirumantiram*, which is acclaimed as the tenth *Tirumurai*. The Vedic tradition, the Agamic cult and the Bhakti-Marga coalesced in *Tirumantiram*, which systematised the metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects of Saivism. It contains three thousand stanzas, divided into nine sections called tantras and explicates the Saiva

ritual practices, yogic disciplines, ethical progression by the “sariya, kriya, yoga and jnana pathways”, and resolves all differences and divisions in the unifying Vision of Siva.

In the “Upadesham” cantos, Tirumular exhorts the seekers of Truth to practise deep concentration and fixed attention in order to experience the true essence of his sacred text—“Manam oruvazhi padal mantiram”. It shall lead them through high-powered yogic insights to the seat of bliss in the inmost depth of their true being. He lays great stress on the gravity of inner attitudes of devotees, whereby the heart and the mind in unison can be directed to the light of Siva to blossom in love. They shall experience the vision of “Tatparam”.

The fragrance of Siva wafted in the core of one's being.

Tirumantiram 1421

The unity of the central theme of the *Tirumantiram* is based on Agamic beliefs and practices on the philosophical level, while not ignoring the ethical and metaphysical levels of understanding the cardinal truths of “Sivabhogam, Siva-jnanam and Sivanandam”—Siva-experience, Siva-knowledge, and Siva-bliss”. 1422.

They are the suddha Saivas who seek such a union with the ultimate.

—Tirumantiram 1422

They seek an experience of the Absolute One by controlling the senses, freed from all temporal knowledge of the tattvas and become one with the object of knowledge.

—Tirumantiram 1422

Tirumular is considered the prince of Siva-Yogis.

Such yogic insights of inner awareness, where the seen disappears in the ‘seer’, are glorified in the *Tirumantiram*. Tirumular himself was one such suddha Saiva, with “myself

and thyself" obliterated, who experienced the truth of "Om Tat Sat". It is the highest realisation.

By saying "Taanentru —Him-self", he was at the same time saying, "Naan entru—Me-Self", and his realisation consummated, when by saying "Him—Taan", his own "I-ness" melted into oneness. It was the unique experience of Pure Awareness by the seer.

—Tirumantiram 1441

Taanentru naanentrum caarakil lene.

Centru Sivamaatal Siddhanta Siddhiye.

—Tirumantiram 1437

St. Tirumular was thus firmly rooted in the unitive experience of becoming non-dual with Siva. His *Tirumontiram* is a Tamil classic which sees the unity of all things in Siva, revealing their inter-links and inter-relationships, intercasting in several gradations. The *Periyapuranam* gives St. Tirumular pre-eminence with St. Sambandar, St. Appar and St. Sundarar for upholding the unity of all things in Siva, and recovering the faith of the common people in the inter-linked relationships of man with Siva. The beauty of the lives of these Nayanmars, who made self-discipline and self-knowledge as the basis for experiencing Siva as Love was enshrined in their soulful songs on Siva.

The Lord was accessible to all who sought Him with earnest love and therefore they stressed that the goal of realising Siva had its social relevance. The co-relationship of man and Siva, indivisible and infinite, should lead to harmonious relationships with others and develop virtues of justice, tolerance and magnanimity. The content and methodology of Saiva-Neethi as revealed in the Saiva Agamas were ably expounded by Tirumular, and the *Tirumantiram* today is a significant terminal for the direct perception of Reality—the ultimate truth of Sivam.

He transcended all, beyond all,
Yet remains witnessing all.

—Tirumantiram 14

*Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi's Revelation on
Periyapuranam*

We give an account of Maharshi's revelation on the sixty-three saints in his own words.

“One of the new features related to the temple of Meenakshisundareswara. Formerly I would go there rarely with friends, see the images, put on sacred ashes and sacred vermilion on the forehead and return home without any perceptible emotion. After the awakening into the new life, I would go almost every evening to the temple. I would go alone and stand before Siva, or Meenakshi or Nataraja or the sixty-three saints for long periods. I would feel waves of emotion overcoming me. The former hold (Alambana) on the body had been given up by my spirit, since it ceased to cherish the idea I-am-the body (Dehatma-buddhi). The spirit therefore longed to have a fresh hold and hence the frequent visits to the temple and the overflow of the soul in profuse tears. This was God's (Isvara's) play with the individual spirit. I would stand before Isvara, the controller of the universe and the destinies of all, the Omniscient and Omnipresent, and occasionally pray for the descent of his grace upon me so that my devotion might increase and become perpetual like that of the sixty-three saints. Mostly I would not pray at all, but let the deep within flow on and into the deep without. Tears would mark this overflow of the soul and not betoken any particular feeling of pleasure or pain. I was no pessimist. I knew nothing of life and had no idea that it was full of sorrow; and I had no desire to avoid

rebirth or seek release, to obtain dispassion (*vairagya*) or salvation. I had read no books other than the *Periyapuranam*, my Bible lessons and bits of Tayumanavar or Tevaram. My notion of God (or Isvara, as I called the infinite but Personal Deity) was similar to that found in the *puranas*. I had not heard then of Brahman, Samsara, etc. I had no idea then that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything and that myself and Isvara were both identical with it."

—Self-Realization, 15

It was about the same time—perhaps a few months later—that another interesting event happened in his life. He found at home a copy of *Periyapuranam* which his uncle had borrowed. This was the first religious book that he went through apart from his class lessons and it interested him greatly. It gave him a novel experience—like the first reading of the Arabian Nights to many a youth. It transported him to a different world, unlike the dry, uninteresting world he had been accustomed to. That book gives a moving account of the sudden accession of faith, deep love of God, utter self-sacrifice, and sublime communion with Him, which marked the lives of the sixty-three Tamil saints. As he read on, surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession, thus paying a momentary homage to the grand ideals and ideas that had charmed the hearts and engaged the minds of his countrymen for centuries.

—Self-Realization, 25

By B. V. Narasimha Swami





THE DYNAMISM OF TEMPLE WORSHIP

IN the *Periyapuranam*, St. Sekillar had surveyed the multi-dimensional links forged by the explorers of Truth in their quest of the Source of Existence. His systematic formulation of the dynamic functions and broad-based programmes of spiritual guidance displayed by the Saiva elect continue to captivate the religious imagination of millions of people who owe allegiance to the *Sanatana Dharma*, that is Hinduism, even today. They are the power-bearers who have drawn freely from the mighty power centre, the Source of Divine Energy, that is Siva. They mediate self-knowledge and universal good by explicating the metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects of "Saiva-Neethi" in a comprehensive and active way. It is indeed a penetrative insight into Reality valid for all ages and climes.

The *Upanishad* seer declares in *Isavasyam* that the face of Truth is hidden by a golden lid and that the sustainer should uncover it, so that the seeker can behold it. Temples are considered one such source—centre of spiritual power, where the face of Truth stands uncovered. By virtue of the dynamic power vested there by the succession of enlightened seers who made temples the base for their *sadhana* (practice) and fulfilment, and established as they were in conformity with the vision of Reality envisaged by the Agamic seers, these places of worship generated great spiritual energy, endowing earnest seekers with inward strength and peace. The temples thus bear testimony to the science of man's evolutionary expansion to greater insights into the secrets of existence.

Hindu Temples as Divine Energy Centres

In their infinite wisdom, these ancient super-scientists concentrated on the crucial link, the connecting point—the *Bindu*—between the unmanifest and the manifesting worlds of the thirty-six *tattvas* or constituents of existence. It is the mid-point where the value of consciousness, “Chit”, becomes transformed into energy, where the static starts to be kinetic, the unchanging becomes transformed into change. It is the centric force from where spring inter-actions and differentiations between absolute truth and relative truth, and what is ephemeral and what is eternal.

Modern nuclear scientists have worked at energy structures and patterns with millions of iridescent particles and lightwaves floating in the cosmos and in the subtle prāna sheath (body) of living beings, but so far none could fathom their unifying links with the supreme symmetry that is transcendental Sivam. St. Sambandar and St. Tirumular Nayanmars by their yogic insights discovered that this pranamaya, the vital energy within man, was associated with universal consciousness.

They discerned the impact of the force of a conscious intelligent consciousness, conserved in the terminal part of the spinal column known as Muladharam. This centripetal force functions as the creative energy in the cosmos as well, unfolding the drama of the fivefold operations of creation, preservation, dissolution, veiling and *anugraha* (gracious) aspects symbolised in the form of the dance of Sri Nataraja at the Chidambaram temple, revered as the heart-centre and centre of the cosmos.

In “suddha saivas” like the Nayanmars, we see a dynamic orientation of the spiritual essence naturally tending towards perfection and embracing all other ends. This spontaneous hold on the part of the human being is the dynamic movement set up by cosmic laws. It is called in Saivism the Grace of Siva, by which the spiritual being that is man moves

towards the Supreme Will, as to its centre of existence. Its centre is in Siva, and it participates in divine essence, and assimilates to itself by this very movement the fulness of "esse", which is Siva. It realises that this "esse" is at the same time autocentric.

Eatha Nilaikalum aanghe—Kanda
yaan thaan irandartu irunthathum aanghe.

In the dedicated Saiva Nayanmar, there is the active attraction towards this Absolute Being.

We see this infinite dynamism at work in their several acts of illimitable love and in their affirmation of temples as the power-centres of God; they guide man to the evolutionary end of Advaitic unity. They uphold *Saiva-Neethi* as the norm of man's morality and the source of his moral freedom. A deeper knowledge of the temples and their transcendental relation to the Absolute Will paves the way for a satisfying grasp of the truth of human-divine bi-unity. The Saiva saints offered their exuberance of love in their hymns and songs with confirmed necessity and spontaneity and in full enjoyment of His supporting grace manifested in the many temples visited by them. These inheritors of the supreme harmony of Sivam cherished and sustained the confraternity of the votaries of Siva—Mei-Adiyar—who congregated in the hallowed temples which were the repositories of Siva's wisdom and power.

. . . . anparadu mariiyi
Maalara neyam malinthavar Vedamum
Aalayam tha anum aran enath tholume.

—S.J.B. XII

Hindu temples were structured so as to embody the dynamic emanation of spiritual power, and the Saiva saints who were power-carriers gave active guidance to the common people on the modes of religious practices which would

develop the non-dual relationship of man (*pasu*) with God (*pathi*). Their powerful hymns reflect their profound knowledge of myths and *puranic* allusions which brought home in a realistic way the truth of the three well-defined aspects of the unitive experience of the *anma* with Sivam. In their communion—*Ontrai*—it was like the blending of body and soul. In their diversity—*verai*—it functioned as the light of the eye and the light of the sun, and in their concomitance—*udanai*—it was like the knowing power of the soul and the seeing power of the eye.

The Efficacy of Temple Worship

Sambandar Peruman did not write commentaries on the Agamic or Vedic texts, nor did he deliver discourses on the tenets of the Saiva way of life (*Saiva-Neri*), but he sang sweetly and spontaneously on Siva before the presiding deities of the temples visited by him. In Tamilakam, temple worship replaced Vedic sacrificial rites. What had to be offered in sacrifice was not an animal but the soul—man's egoism (*ahan-karam*). The offering of fruits and flowers, milk and incense, *naivedhyam*, prostration before the sanctum sanctorum singing His praises signified the surrender of one's self as sacrifice. Self-sacrifice was regarded as the pivotal point of worship by the Saiva seers. This is the *Sivarpanam* referred to in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Temple worship in the *Periyapuranam* was hailed as an unerring way to the people at large to work out their liberation from the fetters of triple defilement (*Mummalam*). They are the effect of deeds—*karma malam*, delusion of believing what is unreal to be real—*mayamalam*, and the inherent dominance of "I and mine"—*anava malam*. Besides, temple worship promoted a loving dialogue between man and man and regulated selfless service for the common good of the community.

St. Appar demonstrated by his many acts of lowly service in the temple precincts that the Saiva community should cultivate the spirit of sacrifice, love and service as offered to the Lord whose patronage they enjoyed in temples located in their region. In his famous hymn—"Nilai perumar ennu-thiyel nenje Nee vaa".

O Mind, if you yearn to be in everlasting peace,
Come and worship our Lord daily in His Temple.

Appar Adigal addresses the mind to follow the code of regular worship in the temple—"Nithalum Em piranudaiya Koyil Pukku." He insists in this canto sung before the Lord of Tiruvarur temple that the worshippers should be engaged daily in cleaning the precincts, decorating the entrances with artistic *Kolam* designs, making flower garlands to adorn the deity, singing hymns of praise and prostrating in full surrender before the inner shrine, thereby establishing a rapport between the worshipper and the worshipped.

Insights into these truths have been revealed in the *Periyapuranam*. evolved through the experiences, functions and thought formulae of these votaries of Truth. Temple worship opens out vistas of expansion of man's consciousness, effecting a progression from the changing to the unchanging, from the many to the One Supreme Father-Mother, —*Anmai-Appan*—who is omniscient and omnipotent. Serene radiations of energy have been preserved and made available in varying degrees in the South Indian temples of great antiquity and hallowed by the presence of powerful yogis, siddhas and saints. It stands to reason that seekers of Truth divested of the burdens of modernism and following in the trail of these Nayanmars could also imbibe inspirational insights and power from these storehouses of divine energy for their ethical and spiritual enlightenment.

The many episodes cited in the lives of these seers by St. Sekillar only enhance the life-strengthening and ennobling devotion that actuated these receptive wise men called

Sivajnanis with the potency of the Supreme Reality. Their experiences have proved beyond doubt the efficacy of temple worship, the incantation of the Name of the Lord, and service (*Siva thondu*) leading to the knowledge of the Self to remove obstacles and effect cures in the deeper levels of body, mind or soul.

These power-bearers, the minstrels of Siva, wandered from shrine to shrine, visiting about two hundred and fifty temples in the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms and exalting the gracious attributes and the heroic feats of Siva in exquisite poetry, music and dance. In their sonorous compositions, they have guided the common people to apprehend Reality through humanistic insights and natural beauties, so as to evolve a coherent yet dynamic view of life. St. Sambandar plaintively invokes the Diety "Nedunkalameiya Piran" and "Avaduthurai arane" to effect the transforming acts of grace to all who approached Him with humility and devotion. The mythological figures of gods, Devas and Asuras depicted in the rock-hewn pillars and tiered Gopurams of the temples rendered visible the cosmic drama of the forces of good and evil and elemental nature.

The devotees who frequent the temples at some stage or other will experience through seeing these unforgettable visual mythic deeds of Siva and His manifestations through festivals and musical recitals, the deeper meanings of life.

Release is theirs and theirs alone

Whose heart is for ever fixed on the Lord.

The unique contribution of Nayanmars was that they made temple worship a popular movement and promoted goodwill and harmony among all ranks and classes. Above all, they gave a new status quo to cultural and social responsibilities. They made visible the grand insight of seeing the Vision of Reality, *Paraparam*, the all-pervading One as the indivisible, inseparable Indweller within one's interior being. In

unswerving awareness, with 'Myself' and 'Himself' obliterated, the Nayanmars, who frequented the temples as power-centres, experienced within the truth of infinite Siva and transmitted this intuited Reality in their canonical *Tirumurai* collections to posterity :

He made me Himself,
Of me and Thee think not as two.
Lo ! I knew myself in Himself,
The mind died to thought.

Ennai Thaanaaki Kondaan
Ennai thaan arinthen
Manam thaan iranthen.

—Tirumantiram

The jubilant songs which they sang so spontaneously before the local temples admitted of no contradiction or doubt, and resounded the flow of grace as common to all mankind, independent of time and space and involving a supreme symmetry and reality. The Thevaram Odes are infused with the potent power of the legion of Siva, their intersection and union have merged into oneness at an infinite level of super-symmetry. The famous cantos on "The Letters Five" of the Saiva elect, their soul-stirring songs on Thillai Koyil, Tiruvarur, Kanchi, Tiruvaïaru and Seerkazhi signify a totality of all knowledge, an elimination of all that has gone before it and behind it, not one, not two, but it is *Thann*—a unitive experience of seer and seen.

Ontraaha Ontrin, azhivila inpaatheetham

—Ozhivillodukam

The Saiva Nayanmars have provided us with a spontaneous storehouse of energy in their mellifluous poetry and songs, which could be sung in temples where are installed the active Siva-sakti energy. Therefore the worshippers can cultivate an attitude of self-surrender to a higher power which

subtly activates their inner energy. This kind of receptiveness to the energising power of Siva is testified to by the Nayanmars who made the Hindu temples great reservoirs of spiritual power and harmony, and effected many miraculous cures in these abodes of divine radiation, where serene peace and profound fraternity prevailed at all times.

In the *Periyapuranam*, Sekillar extols the glory of their realisation—*Siva-Anandam*—"beyond the darkness, set in the cavern of the heart, beyond the firmament that splendour, into which the servitors of Siva pass."

Para Jnanathaal parathai tharisithoor
Parame paarthiruppar.

They who attain pure knowledge
Gazing at the infinite Absolute,
They alone enjoy the vision of Reality.

—Tirumantiram





ATTUNING TO THE LOVE OF SIVA : THE GREAT EXPERIENCE

In the sacred collections of the *Tirumurais* and the *Periyapuranam*, we discover the great secret of the spiritual insights of the Nayanmars unravelled to the “seeing eye” and made known to the world by the effulgent light of Siva. The revelatory canticles have laid bare their inner dispositions which have become pure and unconditioned. They breathe refreshing courage and hope, that through seeking, suffering and service, the bruised self of man can break through its sheaths and layers of consciousness and experience the pure, creative light of wisdom and power pervading all, irradiating all, knowing all, in an all-embracing love.

The *Periyapuranam* in its comprehensive survey of the Saiva pathway considers this great experience, not as an external process but as an essential inner process, leading the *Anma* to the centre of one’s being, freed from the illusion of the stranglehold of deeds, and the aggrandisement of the “I and mine” (self-love). Each sacred hymn of our Saiva seers, the Nayanmars, is a “magnificat” on their vital experiences. Their soul-stirring plea is to reject all inhibiting factors, and become aware of the Indweller within, so that Siva’s bounteous grace and man’s unforgettable love can effect a great transformation in the pattern of human living.

The intrinsic constellation of the light within is an infinite living consciousness. It is the wondrous transformation of knowledge into the intensity of wisdom. “Rational thought

becomes synthesised thought, and passes on to symbolic thought where it sees unity in the various processes. Then follows light thought causing thoughts to be vitalised and infused with light." We have used the vocabulary of nuclear science to unfold the eternal relationship of Siva and the votaries of Siva-Neri. St. Pattinathar dwells on this ineffable experience in a famous ode :

In the tiny hair that grows in clusters,
 In the surface skin that spreads and saves,
 In the flesh beneath, sore and ruddy,
 In the gushing blood that streams within
 In ceaseless ills that cleave to the heart
 In all I searched in vain;
 I found not self; nor know it is what
 Oh God, whose part is Sakti Lord of Ganga !
Thy lustrous Light with benign Grace pierces
 The murky clouds of Maya and bestows Wisdom
 True for me to receive; and all Thy Glory, when
 I thus perceive, Thy SELF is known and myself too.

—Tirumurai XI

St. Pattinathar confirms the age-old truth of "Know thy self and thou shalt know all things." In all true perceptions, one experiences the creative essence in its infinite mood. That everything has come forth from the divine will of an Absolute Power has become quite clear even to the nuclear scientists, and this affirmation is meant to experience infinitude in the finitude of forms.

The beauty of self-awareness as it occurred to the mind and thought realms of India's sages can be realised by everyone since it lies confined in the mid-point of one's own being, the vital energy, *elu param jyothi*, the Light within by whose grace one lives in awareness in time and in eternity.

From the beginning of time, man has known this truth and has wrestled with this grand conception. But few indeed, very few only, have comprehended it, and still fewer have experienced it from the chain of evidence in our religious texts. The profound expression of this inexpressible, living experience in non-dual union with Siva—"at His Feet", as the scriptures indicate—is revealed in the sublime canticles of the *Tirumurais* by the immortal scribes of Siva and extolled in the *Periyapuranam* by St. Sekillar.

The incantation of their divine-human symphony instils awe and stillness in the interior of man's being, and with lowly restraint, man is led into the recesses of the impenetrable and deepest wisdom of the self-luminous, supreme Siva. This is the means and end of the Saiva-Neri, the true religion of Saivism of which Saiva Siddhantam is the philosophy.

The Impact of Love—Anbe Sivam

The love of Siva, "Anbe-Sivam", opens new pathways to God, the Incomprehensible. Pursuing this vista, the ego-centricity of man is dissolved in an intense contemplation of Siva (*Sat*), whose "Being" is experienced as the Real and the True. The living and radiating energy of Siva contains everything within itself and all activities spring from it. It is termed Tiru Arul—Divine Grace. Man interprets things and events around him in accordance with the working of this Grace in its veiled form. On it depends the obscuration, the veiling of our consciousness-nucleus, which does all our recording and interpreting of the significance of events, leading to inner awakening attained with inner ripeness. The process of ripening too is brought about by His grace and with awakening love comes a tremendous urge upon man to find a solution within.

For the most part of our life, we are buried like a seed in the earth, buried with the precise aim of developing and reaping a good crop. One experiences Siva's vitalising, all-

pervading Omnipotence, His Creative Energy and His Divine Will, charged with power causing all laws and activity in the stage of obscurity at first, and maturing later into greater and more expansive insights. It is the *Kriya Sakti* aspect of Siva at work, concealing its powers when we are still bound to the phenomenal world, and revealing its grace when we are freed from the bonds of the senses.

There is another aspect permeating the universe. It is the vital energy of serenity and harmonic fulness which is the work of *Ichha Sakti* or divine love. Then there is the height-end energy with its universal wisdom which makes everything in the world lucid and clear, ordered and principled. This is *Jnana Sakti*. All these three are the varied aspects of the potential, living, creative energy known as *Cit Sakti*, working on the consciousness of the self with its inherent obscurities, the enveloping illusion of the separate self and the denser involutions of matter. The terrible limitations of the senses keep the *Anma*, the essential human being, for long buried like a seed in the ground. The Saiva saints in the *Periyanapuranam* pave the way for the *Anma's* growth, from stem to foliage, from bud to flower, from unripe to ripe fruit. It is the grand truth of the Beauty of Love, "Anbe Sivam"; it is the omnipotent Divine Will at work and which abides deep within one's essence. It evolves man's consciousness into higher states of experience.

Here is our self, like a bedimmed emerald at first, which has been fixed to a frame holder, so that it can be polished. The frame-holder is our body, holding our consciousness which becomes polished on the wheel of Karmic processes, until it starts to shine intensely. Now it is on the spiritual pathway to the life of Siva realisation, relinquishing the ego 'I' and attuned to the Eternal Being in the centre, through the repeated processes of obscurity and evolution. *This attuning to the reality of Siva is the fundamental purpose of living*, and we must learn to set our compass in the direction of the *Periyanapuranam* mariners to guide the storm-tossed boat

(of human existence) to our port of call. Then we shall discover that Time, the unerring law of the phenomenal world, will also prove non-real in juxtaposition with timeless Eternity, which lies hidden within this crumbling sheath of the human body. Siva, no longer a hiding player, stands revealed as the enchanting Beloved and the pining soul at journey's end exclaims with intense love :

Truly I have seen the hiding player, Lo !
The ambrosial bountiful Grace, See
The splendour of His Grace, I saw—you too see.
On earth His blessed Feet did tread, See.
And realising Him as Siva Beloved,
I felt the peace, See.
When in Grace, He made me His, See.
He who is the Lord of the Blue eyed Sakti, See.
This eternal power and Siva in Oneness
I saw, Yea, I saw my Fount of Grace
At the touch of whose felicity
My happiness knew no bounds !

—Tiruvacagam 3-58-66

The great Giver knows everything and everything is known simultaneously, and underneath the cool shade of His Feet of Grace, evil there is not, nor impurity, nor the density of deeds, nor unstable ground. The man of God beneath His sheltering Feet realizes that all is right AS IT IS, and the way, the process of completion too, is right.

Viewed in this perspective, we begin to perceive the inveterate roles of *Anavamalam*, that determinate self-will clouding our vision of the highest, the iron hold of *Karma* and the world of *Maya* with its manifold delusions. They bring about the necessity of self-activity in order to experience joy and sorrow, love and hate, desire and desirelessness through which processes only, there can be an awakening of the erstwhile dormant *Anma*.

There is a moving reference in the grand epic of Saivism, the *Periyapuranam*, which recounts the evolution of Saakya Nayanar, as a Sivajnani, who learnt to practise out of conviction the precepts of Saivism even though he was brought up as a Buddhist. In the course of his spiritual life, he discovered his intimate allegiance to the Saiva-Neri and by Siva's grace became convinced of the validity of the four cardinal truths of the Saiva pathway—that there is the *deed*, the *doer*, the *consequence of action*, and the *One* who awards deserts to the doer. Saakya Nayanar realised that it was only Saiva-Neri that showed the pathway to realizing Siva's grace and by his silent devotion, he followed from within the light of Siva and attained *Mukti*. He realized that ostentatious outward rituals and forms of worship did not matter, so long as he took to ceaseless remembrance of the Name of Siva. While outwardly remaining in the Buddhist fold, he attained the Feet of Siva and has an honoured place in the *Periyapuranam* as a servitor of Siva.

If we are sure of our goal and also sure of the pathway, as has been clarified in our approach to the *Periyapuranam*, we must not halt but proceed to the summit to find the totality of the Truth of Siva, the synthesis of the working of the gracious power of *Cit-Sakti*; and only then can we finally reach journey's end or as the Saiva Agamas would have it, the termination of the cycle of birth and death.

The Sadhana aphorisms in the *Sivajnanabotham*, the cryptic manual of Saivism, advocate obedience to laws temporal and eternal at every stage of the evolution of man, which in turn will effect the vital purification of consciousness in its material, moral and spiritual dimensions. In other words, the Saiva Agamic stages of *Sariya*, *Kriya*, *Yoga* and *Jnana* margas in their cumulative effect will unfold pure potential Love, Will, Insight and Wisdom—*Ichha*, *Kriya*, *Yoga* and *Jnana*—within the *Anma*, leading to the culminating Bliss of Siva-realisation.

This goal of purified man, with the heightening of his love unto Siva is the significant teaching of the *Periyapuranam*. Tiruvarulpayan, the Saiva text on the fruit of divine grace, defines the stage of Bliss—Anma Labham thus :

When the Anma and the 'known' combine, it is bliss
He gives bliss to those that draw nigh to Him.
His Form is perfect blessedness, nor can this be
enhanced.

The Lord imparts supreme felicity to those who draw nearer to Him in love. These are the knowers who like the Saiva Nayanmars, know nothing but the known.

Within and without, Lo ! divine Grace stands
revealed.

Those who possess this mystic vision despise nothing.

Tiruvarulpayan X

The Resonance of Sivajnanam and Siva-Anandam

Sri Umapathy's *Sivaprakasam* too declares that to those who have attained divine wisdom, Siva stands revealed within, and is seen equally in outer forms as Lingam and other insignia, in which He reveals Himself. The purified man does not despise any devices for realising the presence of the Immanent Siva.

From the vortex of the *Periyapuranam's* insight to see everything as Siva, *Sivamayam*, Sekillar moved on to focus the searchlight on the attainment of inseparable union with Siva, *Siva Gathi*, as the ultimate goal of the legion of Siva. Siva is Love serene; He is luminous Being; His is supernal Wisdom, Power and Will. The light within the *Anma* illumined by His Grace vibrates the resplendence of the Supreme Reality, and the *Anma* experience *Sivabhogam*, the commingling in blissful communion. A commentator on the

Sivajnanabotham observers tacitly :

Those who have experienced It are silent;
Those who have not, utter indirect proofs
and expose their hollowness.

It is imperative that we synthesise our approach to the Saiva way of life and its philosophy of Siddhantam and rescue it from abstruse researchers and bring it to the common man, mainly through the living experiences of the Saiva seers. A thorough study of their lives and teachings, their songs and experiences will be a richly rewarding achievement. There are many pathways leading to non-dual life with Siva.

Your Sakti dwells in your centre as you in her mid-
point,
You and Sakti dwell in the centre of my being.
Bestow Thy Grace that I may move in the midst of
thy devotees.
Thou of Golden Hall, who art without beginning
and end;
I yearn for Thy unfailing Presence. Reveal and
fulfil my quest.

—The Temple Ode. Tiruvacagam 21.1





THE THREE ELECT

St. Sundaramurti Nayanar

IN the prologue to the *Periyapuranam* Sekillar recounts the divine voice of Siva extolling the noble attributes of the galaxy of Saiva consecrated saints, and bidding St. Sundarar sing of their matchless servitude to Him:

In matchless glory they shed unique lustre
By devotion nonpareil they attain me.
Their integral harmony is the key
To the mastery of the world,
Neither ills nor bonds are they swayed by,
In peerless stature they are supreme,
By the power of love, they enjoy bliss divine,
Duality they have transcended.
Do thou resort to this fine galaxy.

—Periyapuranam V-196-197

Thus did the Lord exhort Sundarar and thus was Nambi-Arurar initiated into the flawless pathway of the servitors of Siva :

Naan ingu Etham thiir neriyai pettren.

The Lord so willed that Sundarar should be admitted to the holy company of His servitors and commanded him to make known to all, the Saiva path leading to the cessation of suffering.

Who will fail to see if once Thou openest Thy eye?
 O Thou with the lighted Eye on Thy forehead
 Who can see if Thou but close Thy Eye?

—St. Appar

Sundarar responds to this bidding of Lord Siva to extol the holy galaxy. Armed with humility, equanimity and integrity, he tunes himself joyfully in worshipful reverence to carry out the Lord's injunction, and sees in it a flawless pathway to rid himself of pain and imperfection. He is filled with melting love towards the holy band of Siva votaries, and takes the pledge of loyal service to each of these mighty warriors. Drawn by an irresistible allegiance to these renowned legion of Siva, he muses on the transcendent glory of the infinite Being who pervades the universe.

He begins by paying obeisance to Siva's devout High Priests, the Anthanar, whose sanctified abode is Thillai. They were the guardians of the Chidambara Rahasya, the internal, ceaseless vibration of the Lord of Dance at Thillai. St. Sundarar thus composes the garland of verses, listing the well recognised Saiva saints in his famous *Thiruthondath Thogai*, which forms an authentic source for Sekillar's *Tiruthondar-Periyapuranam*. The poet of Tiruvarur St. Sundarar, also called Nambi Arurar, towers as the central hero in the *Periyapuranam*, which consolidated a treasury of experience, established popular Saivism with its universal appeal to the masses as well as to the cloistered custodians of Saiva madhams and monasteries.

On St. Sundarar, who came to be known as the boon-companion of God Siva, and who was inseparably devoted to the Lord of Tiruvarur, was bestowed the pure intuitive insight to sing his lay on the servitude of the devoted servitors of Siva. St. Sekillar's prologue was an elaboration of Sundarar's famous ballad on the grand assembly of Godmen,

who were themselves their equals, with none to surpass them in the attainment of indissoluble bliss in Siva.

In the world of plurality, Sundarar enacted a vast range of incredible acts and subjected himself to immense obscurations and deprivations, but as a faithful votary of Siva, he vowed to serve Him with loving companionship. He overcame all obstacles by a metamorphosis effected within his inner being. In one of his moving decades, he has sung that his relationship with the world of time and space was not to split, but to unify and harmonise in love.

What folly! How long can I remain apart from Thee?
I will arise and go and worship at Aarur, My Lord,
Supreme.

VII. 51.1

He was an impeccable devotee of the Lord of Tiruvarur with the ceaseless remembrance of Siva's name throbbing within his inmost heart:

Linked to naught else in life, my mind thinks only
of Thy Holy Feet.

I'm born anew, from this time forth I pass the way
of birth no more.

In Kodumudi, Lord austere, where wise men
with praises greet Thee.

Even if I forget Thee, my tongue will utter adoringly
Namasivaya.

St. Sundarar VII. 48.1

Subject as man is to desire and fear, he needs the guidance of a guru; in the case of Sundarar, the light of God radiating its rays beamed from the Siva-Guru. The bard of Tiruvarur's actions were mooted always after ascertaining the Will of Siva. He obeyed the dictum of entering into a dialogic relationship with the Lord and exemplified, in his realisation, the relationship of a friend with God, as a boon companion. God was his best

friend. He called upon Him at every crucial moment in his life. He had only to "ask" and it was given to him. The mitigation was entirely left to the will of the Lord to fulfil. In this manner, he was a realised being who saw Siva in everything and everything in Siva. There were no 'I' and 'He', but 'Thaan' (Sivam) only, wherever he turned his gaze :

The Holy Feet are Sivam

The Holy Feet are Siva's world

The Holy Feet are life's goal,

The Holy Feet are my sure refuge.

His devotional hymns and decades were full of love and compassion for toiling humanity at grips with the relative values of the world.

It is noteworthy that in the very last phase of his life, his beloved Tiruvarur, Tirunavalur, Paravaiyar and the fraternity of servitors in the Devasiriya Hall, with whom he was so intimately associated had no gravitational pull for him. He left them all and journeyed to Cheraman Perumal's capital to spend his last days with him in deep contemplation. Both the votaries were in unison with pure consciousness centred on the mid-point of Siva and were steeped in insatiable love of the one infinite Being. So it came to pass that one day, Sundarar mounted the elephant sent by the Lord's command. When Cheraman Perumal came to know of Sundarar's departure, his spontaneity enabled his royal steed to take him in the air with the power generated by the Name of Siva-NaMaSiVaYa. This was an extraordinary feat of perfect unification and attainment of the Ultimate Truth, when the finite converged with the infinite!

They have left their foot-prints in timeless eternity.
Space merges in space, Love in love, Light in light.
He is their shining Truth.

Sekillar has enshrined the way and the goal in the *Periyapurānam*. In Siva-realisation, we are never alone. Sundarar taught a way of life that bestows discrimination and peace with understanding, the peace that strengthens, unifies and illumines our souls, while we are still engaged in pursuing our duties and obligations in the world. We discern with the eye of grace, Sundarar's perception of the vision of Siva in his seventh *Tirumurai* collections of melodious cantos sung by him in appropriate measure :

O madman with the moon-crowned hair,
 Thou lord who art the fount of grace,
 How could I bear to forget?
 My soul hath a place for Thee,
 Venney-nallur, in "Grace's shrine,"
 South of the stream of Pennai, there
 My father, I became all thine;
 How could I now myself forswear?

—St. Sundarar VII. 1.1

Eternal allegiance to Thee alone
 I owe—to none else.

—St. Sundarar VII. 95.1

St. Tirunavukarasu Nayanar

St. Tirunavukarasu popularly known as St. Appar Peruman, belonged to the seventh century and was a contemporary of St. Sambandar. His compositions reflect his many encounters with the antagonistic forces of alien creeds and those for overcoming insuperable obstacles by his pledge of servitude and unfaltering love to the Holy feet of Siva in perfect self-surrender.

In Appar, Sekillar sees a man of intense faith and wonder. His humanism was animated by warmth to feel, cry or love with a sensitiveness to respond to daily happenings around him. He feels through persons and things. He had to face

many challenges in life. He was afflicted with an emaciating disease, and subjected to several ordeals from the Jain hierarchy for deserting their fold. He overcame all these hurdles with the greatest courage and fearlessness, as his Thevaram cantos testify :

No man holds sway o'er us,
 Nor death nor hell fear we;
 No tremblings, griefs of mind,
 No pains nor cringings see,
 Joy, day by day, unchanged
 Is ours, for we are His,
 His ever, who doth reign,
 Our Sankara, in bliss.
 Here to His Feet we've come,
 Feet as fair as flowerets fresh:
 See how His ears divine
 Ring and white conch shells wear.

—St Appar VI. 98.1

The excruciating heat of the room where he was confined, the onslaught of the passionate elephant set upon him, the milk rice mixed with poison and the granite stone tied round his waist, etc. are some of the triumphant experiences, where Appar reposed in the 'shelter of the Grace of Siva, the almighty father'. This boon of grace was his great support—*Perumthunai*, firm support *Nattrunai*, and unfailing prop—*Arumthunai*. Therefore he bids suffering humanity to fix their gaze steadfastly on the luminous Siva's will, and ever remember His feet so that no harm shall ever torment them. The invisible Reality of the Absolute was turned to his side in moments of great crises, so that the unmanifest became manifest and God spoke to him, laid his Feet on his head, and sealed the mark of the trident on his shoulder. "When thoughts recede into thoughtlessness and functions of the senses cease, then grant me the intuitive awareness and the

recognition of love and remembrance of Thy Name," was his soulful plea in his last supplication to Lord Siva.

Unnai unnum unarvai nalhaai.

"In obedience to His will," was the pathway of Appar, the servant of God. To bide His will was to link up with a powerful flow that transcends man's energies. It connected him to that ocean of energy that is perennially Sivam. Hence his woven cadences of poetical compositions were not only liturgical but sacrosanct, and had the power to lead a man of faith to the unfathomable mystery of his inner being. He sings :

Search as they might.
He could not be sighted,
Yet in my search within
I have seen the elusive Lord
In the core of my being.

In these ecstatic moments, Appar felt that everything became transfigured by the uncreated divine energy. The phenomenon of life was linked to the planetary embrace of a new kind of atomic affinity, and brought forth higher levels of synthesis in his consciousness. This is seen in his Thillai Odes known as "Koyil-Tiruvirttham," and Cantos in praise of Tiruvarur where he unfolds the secret of his internal gravitation to draw from the infinite powers around him both spontaneity and coherence.

The moving water He made stand unmoving in His
hair;

My thoughtless heart He fixed in thought of Him
alone;

He taught me that which none can learn, what none
can see, He laid bare;

What tongue tells not He told; He pursued me and
made me His servant

I sighted a male elephant gracefully walking
 In the company of the loving she-elephant.
 Then did I see instantly His Holy Feet of Grace.
 I saw what I had never before seen or known.

The vision of the One in the Many was vouchsafed to St. Appar. He saw God in everything and everything in God. The gravitational pull of his love of Siva in His Immanence was so strong that it effected the necessary transformation in St. Appar. His energy of love reached an omega-point in this instance, and his transcendental experience of the Truth of Parasivam was articulated in his famous poetic paean on Mount Kailas :

Oh Lord of Mount Kailas! Hail, Hail
 Thou hidest deep within me like a perennial spring,
 Ever resounding in sound vibrations art Thou...
 In heightened consciousness Thou dost soar,
 Beauty gleaming in spontaneity art Thou.

The magnetic contact of love from the centre of the universe with the immanent energy hidden in the unbounded depth of the heart of such peerless seers like Appar or Sambandar through atomic affinity ensures a centre of unification, what Teilhard de Chardin calls the "Omega-Point." Love as spiritualised energy transforms all other energies and converges on an all-embracing point, which unites all beings in the divine eye of Siva, the divine Omnipresence. It is in the springs of unfettered love that these minstrels of Siva relished the nectar of His *Prasad* of grace. They experienced profound attraction to the Supreme Siva, who abides in the hearts of all beings as well as in temples and natural abodes in the wide universe.

In exquisite imagery and poetic diction, Sekillar makes us witness the coalescence of the two brilliant seers St. Sambandar and St. Appar, at the sacred temple of Vedaranyam, hallowed by the Vedas. It was not a mere confrontation of

a younger Truth-Seer meeting an elder Servitor of Siva. Their spiritual animation and love of Siva blazed in radiance in their gleaming countenance covered with holy ash and Rudraksha beads, in the "Five Letters" they chanted continuously connoting the divine Name, and in the vivifying currents of the faith of the devotees who followed them. The self-fulfilment seen in St. Sambandar and the self-denial of St. Appar converged in mid-point, and blazed a trail of complete interaction of two-in-one *Anbe Sivam*. Love of God implied love of man and man, and generated currents of power to unite all beings in its embrace.

In a beautiful stanza, Sekillai delineates the evolving world with its dense obscurities and the two most intimate lovers of Siva, St. Sambandar and St. Appar in the unity of one-pointed consciousness. In this case the author of the *Periyapuranam* did not see two seers! The love-energy of Siva in Sakti, the moving principle of grace, clears the clouds of unknowing before the unifying and unanimous vision of Truth perceived by the calf of wisdom, St. Sambandar and the regal Appar at the Vedaranyam temple :

The *ocean of grace* co-extensive and unique,
 All embracing the *ocean of love*, ever expanding,
 The bright essence of the Saiva pathway centred
 In the tender *pairs of eyes* as they converged at
 mid-point.

In order that the world may be energised,
 Siva drank the poison to bestow life eternal,
 When *His Will* commingled with the *Grace of Sakti*.
 Likewise was the communion of the Calf of wisdom
 and the kingly Appar,
 As they both stepped into the Temple of Vedaranyam,
 Where dwells the luminous One adored by the
 celestials.

Truly St. Sambandar and St. Appar stepped into divine omnipresence in a crescendo of love ineffable and experienced the transcendent bliss of Sivanandam.

Their peace which reveals and illumines effects a subtle transformation within us, as we follow from afar these companions of Siva's grace. We join them in their songs which they sang to open and close the massive front doors facing the inner sanctuary of this ancient temple of Vedaranyam, worshipped in ages gone by, by the "Vac-Word" of the Vedas. Is it not enough that they have given us a singularly blessed yearning to know our own true self? The relation of the absolute and finite self is no longer a mystery. Ultimate reality as pure consciousness, love and creative energy is testified to in the life work of these Nayanmars.

St. Appar in the course of his eventful life spiritualised the practice of "Siva-thondu", work as worship of Siva, and enlightened many seekers like Aputhi-Adigal to experience divine love as the goal and fulfilment of life. It was the power and efficacy of love of Siva that made him wake up Aputhi-Adigal's eldest son from the sleep of death as well as bequeath to the world the legacy of his mellifluous songs in three anthologies. We bow in reverential love, as did St. Sundarar to this great servitor of Siva, whose intense devotion, so dynamic and incalculable, contributed the highest value not only from the human plane but also from the point of absolute experience. In him the highest value and reality coincide, "Avan en Kannullane." His is the insight of direct perception of reality that does not seek any more the aid of reflected lights.

St. Tirujnana Sambandar

In the survey of the Saiva seers whom to know is our highest good and the highest goal, St. Tirujnana Sambandar is generally considered as one of the pre-eminent Nayanmars of Siva. He was the divine child who was born in the sacred city of Seerkazhi in the early part of the seventh century A.D.

to an illustrious family of the priestly class of Kauniya Brahmins reputed for their Vedic knowledge and sacrificial rites. At the age of three, he was fed a cup of milk by the 'Ammal-Appan', who appeased this wailing child on the tank bund of Brahmapuram. The child sang a decade in praise of Siva, the Lord of Brahmapuram :

Ear-beringed He rideth on the bull,
 His head adorned with the gleaming crescent moon,
 Besmeared with ash from the cremation ground
 He is the thief who steals away my heart.
 Seated on the lotus-bloom, Brahma offered
 His meek worship and grace obtained.
 This is He, the sovereign Lord of Brahmapuram.

—Tirumurai I.I

The words, "This is He," begin the phase of dynamic Saivism as a living way of life for the masses with its appeal to realise the goal of human existence. St. Sambandar personalises the transcendent Siva, formless and yet assuming the form of grace, to vouchsafe grace to His devotees. Siva revels as "the stealer of hearts." "He who has taken his abiding abode in the core of his being."

The cry of the child is the signal for the advent of the divine mother of grace. From her veiling obscurity, at the right moment, she reveals the power of Siva, in inseparable union with the supreme One who is the agent of dissolution. He dances on the world's cremation-ground, and smears ashes on His body to denote the power of resolving what has been dissolved. The vehicle of the bull typifies "dharma" or righteous living as the basic step of creation, with the Creator Brahma offering worship. The crescent indicates that the Lord protects and conserves the moon from annihilation, while His besmeared body with the ash of the world's crematorium reveals His efficient cause of the absolute being as the

universe. That the Lord of the cosmic operation is also the immanent Lord, who indwells concealed in man's cave of the heart is referred to as the "stealer of hearts" in this song of songs.

The process of understanding the symbolic language has begun to throw fresh light on the canonical Saiva texts, so that the *Tirumurais* are no longer closed treasures; that recurring imagery and symbols and *puranic* lore occur with a definite structure and thought-patterns to express the inexpressible potency of Siva can be discerned in the following canzone of St. Pattinattar of a later age, which interprets the imagery used by St. Sambandar in his first *Thevaram* :

Oh Siva, my God!

Is it to establish the fact, "I am the knowledge of the pure path," that you adorn yourself with the pure moon on the top of your matlock? Is it to remember that virtue excels and truth is all-powerful that you ride on the bull? Is it to vindicate the ground of *being* as the basis of existence, that you stand as "He, She, It?—What conspiracy is it that you should confound those who know you not, as being so near to them. The mind is your abode and yet, what stealth it is that you elude the grasp of human being."

—Tiruvottiyur Orupa Orupatu

Thus St. Sambandar was initiated in the experiential knowledge of Siva, and he began his mission of spreading the excellent truths and practices embodied in the Saiva-pathway in chaste Tamil. St. Sambandar's *Thevarams* embody the truths of Saivism in psalms, the fascination of which never flags. It is not merely the elegance of language, the exquisite grace of diction, the musical inflow and the fitting of syllable into syllable and line to line, that charm and captivate our attention. His words speak from the heart to the heart.

The appeal is through the senses to the soul, from the aesthetic to the spiritual. His cantos on Siva's gracious acts, and the grandeur of the Seerkazhi hymns, like tears spread their translucence even like dew-drops do on the petals of the lotus and effected so many miracles.

His *Thevarams* which comprise the first three anthologies of the Saiva *Tirumurais* are word-garlands woven in praise of Siva, the Supreme One, and are expressed in flawless poetry only because they had been transmitted into the actualities of life's experience and assimilated with his soul's exalted aspirations. This is the secret of the magnetic influence of these songs among the Saivite Hindus even today. His life of sixteen years was one of spotless purity and sublime wisdom. His lyrics allude to Siva's infinite grace, and make reference to the gracious form of Siva as Neelakandan with the blue throat, because out of compassion, He sucked the poison that polluted the ocean of milk, when the Devas and Asuras churned it in affray. Thus He saved them from annihilation. He is also extolled as the All-Embracing One who is both light and darkness.

Thou art right and Thou art wrong,
 Lord of holy Alavay;
 Kinsman, I to Thee belong;
 Never fades Thy light away.
 Thou the sense of books divine,
 Thou my wealth, my bliss art Thou,
 Thou my all, and in Thy shrine
 With what praises can I bow?

St. Sambandar, III 52.3

St. Sambandar's sonorous cantos are filled with the power of Siva's grace. They paved the way for a revival of the Saiva-Neri in what is known as the Dark Age. Kun Pandyan king had been cured by St. Sambandar of a fell disease by the touch of the sacred ash from the Tiru Alavai temple at Madurai.

The Ash hailed in Vedas can dire ills relieve,
The Ash of wisdom from ignorance can mitigate,
The Ash of potency, the Real doth validate,
The holy Ash is this of the Lord of Madura,
Girt with luxuriant fields.

In the controversy that ensued, the alien creeds were routed at the contest when the palm scripts containing the tenets of their creed were consumed in a fire, [while that of St. Sambandar's palm script on which was inscribed the glory of Siva, enthroned in the temple at Nalaaaru, survived the flames. The king had already been reconverted to his old Saiva faith, but it was left to Sambandar to restore Saivism to its ancient glory. In what was known as the final water contest, it was agreed to place the respective palm scrolls of the two opposing contestants in the Vaigai river, and that scroll which floated downstream would be the defeated party, while the scroll that waded up stream against the current would be declared the winning side. Sambandar composed the now famous *Tirupasuram* decad for the occasion. Sekillar's interpretation of this holy hymn is acclaimed as the quintessence of the infallible truth of Siva jnanam. It is a first-hand realisation of the blessed experience of infinite Sivam effected by His plenum of grace.

The scene of the contest between the two opposing forces contending for supremacy in the citadel of Saiva culture and Muthamil tradition is one of great significance. During the seventh century A.D. the Saiva religion was on the wane and the people were weaned from the grass-roots of Saivism and temple worship. In order to stem the tide of decline of an ancient creed and check the growing menace of alien creeds, Sambandar played a significant role. When Queen Mangaiarkarasi and Kulaichirayar invited him to heal the sick king and deliver the Pandyan kingdom from the heretics, Appar who was with Sambandar at that time in Vedaranyam dissuaded the young Sambandar from proceeding to Madurai.

He had his misgivings that the young champion would be exposed to danger from the powerful contestants whose treachery he knew only too well.

The young Sambandar assured Appar that he did not count on the patronage of the Pandyan king or his Queen. In restrained strains of sweet cadence, he extolled the strengthening presence of Siva in the shrine of his heart, and hence assured the elder that no harm would come to him. All evil forebodings, natural and man-made, would melt away and prove good, faultlessly good, to the bonds men of Siva. We see the victorious culmination of his venture into the domain of Madurai, and his courageous vindication of the supreme love and grace of the self-luminous Siva on the banks of the Vaikai river at Tiruvedakam. It marked the turning point of the ascendancy of Saivism in Tamil-Aham.

Sambandar inscribed on the palm scroll the first verse of the *Tirupasuram* Ode :

May enlightened Antanar prosper;
Hail Devas and cows as well,
May refreshing showers of rain increase the land's
plentitude.

May the upright king reign supreme.
Let evil forces perish;
May all reflect on Haran's Name,
That the world be freed from fearful woes.

The ten scintillating verses commented on in great detail by Sekillar in *Periyapurānam* sum up the fulfilment of the Saiva way of life, and his closing line is indeed memorable:

The one who tasted the milk of wisdom proclaims,
That the highest illumination is attainable
By those who are full of the Love of Siva.

Tirupasuram extols the beauty, the glory, the certitude, the grandeur, the luminosity, the magnitude of the transcendent Siva, all-pervading, yet indwelling in grace ineffable in the depth of one's being, animating the true lovers and servitors with the infinitude of love unto His most gracious Feet. His supernal Omnipotence, Omnipresence and Omniscience elude analysis and the logic of energetics. Sambandar reveals the heart-beat of love of Siva as the centre of consistence, the transcendent becoming immanent.

The most exalted illumination is radiant love, so perfect in Siva. This is the loftiest attainment of Man. Such men are the Nayanmars, captivating leaders of a community, the consecrated legion of Sivathondars, owing eternal allegiance as servitors of the most exalted One. All the manifold traits and nuances of the Sivanadiyar portrayed in the *Periyapuranam* are focussed on this centripetal axle of love's luminosity. These Samayachariyars or preceptors of Saivism have been extolled by St. Umaphathi Sivam, one of the well-known exponents of Saivism :

The eternal truth of the absolute Godhead as the supreme transcendent One is established as the everlasting goal in the sacred collections of *Tirumurai* of which *Periyapuranam* is the crest-jewel and composed by a succession of Saiva seers. It does not burn in fire; It resists the river current; It gives life to the bones; It destroys poison; it tames an elephant; it makes a granite stone float in water. It enables a crocodile to disgorge on the tank bund a child which it had swallowed and digested.

Here St. Umaphathi elucidates some of the outstanding acts of grace performed by the most renowned of the Saiva saints. There were others too who followed the Three Elect like St. Kannappar, Karaikal Ammaiyar, Tirunaalaipovar, Cheraman Perumal, Siruthonda Nayanar, Thandiadigal and Chandeswar Nayanar. The knowledge of Siva, the creative movement of His Grace, and the grateful blooms of love

suffused all these votaries of Siva. They transmitted the invincible power of Siva as occasions demanded to relieve the suffering of their fellow beings, and testified to the greatness of Siva, who takes up His abode in the local temples as well as in the temple of the heart of His devotees.

Sekillar commended the selfless service and surrender of all the Nayanmars, while reserving for St. Sambandar the crown of *Sivajnanam*. The supreme knowledge of Siva filled the core of his being as a result of his constant contemplation of the invincible power of Siva's grace symbolised by the *Lotus Feet of Siva*, to the exclusion of all other preoccupations. It is pure Awareness that led St. Sambandar to carry his service to suffering humanity, *Tiruthondu*. By matchless wisdom of the highest art and philosophy, *Kalaijnanam*, and the perfect knowledge of Truth Absolute, *Meijnanam*, did Sambandar, the prince of devotees, attain realization in a short span of sixteen years.

The author of *Periyapuranam* acclaimed that Tirujnana Sambandar embodied the excellent attributes reflected by all the consecrated servitors of Siva :

That the Vedic way of life may prosper,
That Saiva Religion sublime may shine,
That generations of mankind may ever flourish,
Tirujnana Sambandar cried and sang inspired,
He belonged to Seerkazhi, begirt with fertile fields
His flowery Feet, we place on our heads
And commence to promulgate the essence
Of his sacred servitude to Siva.

"The highest wisdom is the love of Sivam" is St. Sambandar's grand message to the world.





VISTAS OF DIVINE GRACE
IN
PERIYAPURANAM

WE shall explore the specialised field of the *Periyapuranam* in our search for the fundamental laws of eternal values. St. Sekillar unfolds with scientific precision and traditional logic, the significant power of Siva and the worship He inspired in the lives of the sixty-three seers. Sekillar has projected India's dynamic heritage of the vision of Truth in and through the commanding lives and compositions of the three illustrious Saiva elect—Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar. Their apprehension of Reality stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things, and today we have to rediscover its spirit to enrich our lives and learn to evolve to higher dimensions of existence.

St. Sambandar's Lyric on "Tiruvelukuttirukai"

The free and fearless child-saint Sambandar's lyrical odes and cantos evoke the spirit of harmony, at once illuminating and life-nourishing. In that exquisite composition entitled *Tiruvelukuttirukai*, which he composed for his father, Siva Pada Hrdayar, he unravels the efficacious attributes and gracious acts of the omniscient and omnipotent Siva and His inherent power of Sakti.

The One remains, infinite and magnificent.

The many change and pass into That Oneness.

The immanent Lord Siva interlinked to His Power of Grace is inter-related to all things seen and unseen in the universe.

This divine bi-unity is expressed at the close of Sambandar's *Tiruvelukuttirukai* poem thus :

Irumaiyin Orumaiyum
Orumaiyin Perumaium.

In dualism inheres oneness
In oneness shines His glory.

"Everything that is, has the fact of its being through being and from being, the *Being* and the *Will* of God." Siva is Self-Luminous, Self-Existent. In relation to the sentient beings—*Pasu*—with whom He stands in a relation of non-difference, He is also *Will*. *Being* and *Will* are related as identity of two distinguishable aspects of the self-same reality. *Being* is conceived from the phenomenal perspective as the Supreme Person—*Pathi*—the Lord. Lordship presupposes possession of Sakti as the integral part of the divine *Being*. *Pathi* stands as the substratum of the freedom of will and freedom of act."

Saivism in Philosophical Perspective

Prof. K. Sivaraman

Siva's Will stands immanently in the will of the individual, operating as self-concealment and self-revelation, and for whom the cosmic functions of evolutionary creativity, protection and dissolution are meant. Siva is the One Absolute, Infinite One, divided into Many. The Many merge in the majesty of the One. Here neither speech nor act can interpenetrate. The truth of the inseparability of Siva unfolds the clue to effect not only self-emancipation, but also world transformation. Siva as the world *Cause* is *Will* according to Saiva Siddhanta. Siva is the sole ground on which everything plays its manifold roles. As supreme *Pathi*—Lord and Ruler—Siva rules from within man's being. In his victorious canto of *Tirupasuram*, Sambandar dwells on the transcendent Reality that is Sivam and establishes the supremacy of Saivism over Jainism and Buddhism. Sekillar's

masterly content of this fascinating canto in the *Periyapuranam* needs our attentive study :

Aar Arivaar Avar Pettiye?

Who ever can fathom His resplendent Majesty ?

Sambandar articulates the infinity of the Formless Form of Siva manifesting as "Being and Freedom of Will." He recounts the core of the religious intuition of Saivism for the benefit of his father and draws from tradition and personal experience the validity of the Saiva-Neri, the way of life, wherein the vision of Oneness stands revealed in a world of multiplicity :

Oh Formless who in Oneness assumed the Form,
Manifesting Thy non-dualness, becoming twofold
Heaven and earth, sun and moon, devas and mortals;
Thou became three to create, conserve and resolve.
In co-presence with wisdom and bliss, Thou resum-
ed Oneness

Under the banyan tree with Thy twin luminous Feet,
Praised by the Four sages at dawn, noon and dusk,
Thou revealed to them the illumined Path indeed..

..Thy All-Inclusiveness none can comprehend in
this wide earth.

Tiruvelukutirukai-Tirumurai 1-7; 46-47

Thus stands revealed the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Truth in the sum-total of the records of the direct and personal experiences of the Saiva seers and preceptors. In their lucid canticles of adoration, they intone the truth of luminous God-experiences. Man's ultimate goal is to experience union and communion, where the will of man becomes one with the divine Will of Grace, and the power-centre and power-bearer commingle in non-dual bliss. Sekillar delineates the

mighty legion of Saiva saints as immanent embodiments of Siva—*Thaan*, intuiting Sivam in luminous wisdom—“Ariyum Arive *Sivamumam*”.

St. Sekillar provides the key to open a vista of a new dimension for man today. In vain have scientists sought, and not found it. World leaders in war and peace have failed to restore the equilibrium, the cosmic world order. First and foremost, man must tune his mind to look inwards, to gaze at his own self, to SEE at the centre of one self, the Supreme as containing no “otherness”. In the words of Plotinus, “A progressive penetration into the interior of the sanctuary—penetration and elevation go together.”

When we ponder on the lives of the sixty-three saints, there dawns a powerful awareness that the universe of which man is only a fragment is a wonderful place to live in and was planned by the divine architect to free man from the fearful grip of matter and its concomitants. Man realises in humility and love as did the Saiva peers that the Energy, the Power-Centre of Siva, His Gracious Sakti, known by various names and forms, impinges upon him at the level of cognising, willing and acting. He recognises the energising *Ichai* and *Kriya* Saktis at work. Power felt within activates the soul and that (*Jnana*) Power seen and unseen in the external and outer realms is Mother Nature. The Saiva philosophers from the days of Mohenjodaro and Harappa to the classical Tamil Sangam era of Tholkappianar and Tiruvalluvar, and to the glorious epoch of the Mediaeval Nayanmar and Santanacharyas have been impressed with the idea that only *one* power base is behind all phenomenon.

This insight into active participation in life and existence in all things and in the individual self accomplished by the dynamic potency of Sakti, the divine will of Siva is the focus of our *Periyapuranam* survey. The stimulating truth, that what is in the macrocosm—universal—is in the microcosm—

individual as well is a priceless achievement of our Saiva seers and philosophers, relevant for today and for all time.

In the light of this supernal vision of Truth, the nature and function of the thirty-six categories of existence (tattvas), the principles and laws that govern the material world and human beings and the inter-play of their infra and supra relationships with each other have to be understood clearly. At this stage, the Saiva Agamas and Tantras step in. They have testified to the requirements and observances in daily life and laid down the norms in their exposition of the *Sariya*, *Kriya*, *Yoga* and *Jnana* pathways. The Saiva Nayanmar have faithfully trodden these pathways leading to the attainment of the realisation of Siva.

Sovereign of the southern land of Pandi,
That Thou shouldst ease the bonds of birth.
They implore Thee,
Whom words declare not;
Beneath Thy sacred Feet,
They commune with Thee
Who art the incantation of their song.
Blessed are they who in obeisance meek
Realise the fulness of attainment
Beneath Siva's Feet.

—Sivapurānam 91-96

Further Insights into Unitive Relationships

The Vedas and Agamas, Sruti and Smṛti, the sacred collections of scriptural texts have proclaimed with one accord the absolute sovereignty of God in his unmanifested and manifested forms and functions. In the human being too, they discovered a centre in infinite space and eternal time. This fundamental principle of the *interlink* between the microcosm and the macrocosm was intuitively perceived by the Saiva

seers and enlightened Nayanmars and they held fast to it, never lost sight of it and applied its ruling guidelines to the daily conduct of life.

They translated into practice concretely these value-norms in all the pujas, rituals and ceremonial worship enshrined in the Saivagamas. Their primary aim was to help their fellow-bondsmen to achieve a total integration of the physical, mental and psychic processes leading to the wholesome fulfilment of the human being. In their lives and works, they appealed to and urged mankind to recover the *link* that forges the unitive relationship between finite-infinite man, the finite world and the Infinite-Parasivam.

In the *Periyapuranam*, the idea of Arul—Grace—finds a distinct line of thought. It is interpreted as ‘a divine creative movement’ for supplying all souls with fields of experiences in which they may enjoy pain and pleasure. Accordingly the grace of God works in conformity with cosmic laws and decrees. The world is revealed to every man in just the manner as he ought to experience it.

Divine grace is defined *not* as a mode of favour or compassion conferred on man. It does not connote either intercession or mediation. It is a movement in favour of getting the right desires in accordance with our karmas. Grace operates in the orderliness of evolutionary creation. It is the universal manifestations of Sakti, of power or capability, regardless of who or what is the external form of its manifestation.

St. Sekillar depicts in his study of St. Sundarar the experiences of the “ups and downs” in his life such as the loss of his eyesight and the obstruction of his marriage ceremony, as movements of the grace of God—the upward movement of inner illumination and the downward state predicting a tug-of-war with non-essentials and trivialities. The power of Siva, His Form and Will operate on the *anma* as its eternal prop and its saving grace. The marvellous acts of grace

recorded in *Periyapuranam* appear to be "the religious name for whatever happens".

St. Sekillar steeped in the faith of the Saiva way of life sees in the movements of the Saiva Nayanmars a concrete form of worship. Devotion to Siva came to be regarded as the criterion of faith and superceded Vedic rituals. Siva is omniscient and is regarded as the efficient cause, while Sakti, in other words, His Grace, is known to be the instrumental cause of all things. Consciousness is of the nature of intuitive knowledge and spontaneous action. This consciousness abides in the *anma* and hence the Saiva Agamas dwell at length on the categories of Sariya, Kriya Yoga and Jnana for the application of this consciousness.

The Divine-Human Bi-Unity

Sekillar understood that ultimate Reality is also immanent, operating both *as* the material world and *in* the material world. The main focus is on the power of Siva operating *within* the world as an inward, interior phenomenon. The pathways of Sariya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana often afford a clue to the effort of the adherents of the Saiva tradition to hold together in both thought and worship the different aspects of the divine nature. Hence the emphasis of the Saiva canonical texts on worship and rituals to intensify the worshipper's awe and adoration. This view of Ultimate Reality has continued through the centuries as a vital Presence in the life of the Saivites.

Thus the *Periyapuranam* projects Ultimate Reality as both transcendental and immanent, masculine and feminine and within the ambit of time and eternity. Time and space have their emotional connotations. They attest at every crucial moment the polarity between transcendent, undifferentiated consciousness and the active power immanent in a universe of complex relationships and constant activity.

What is needed is the cultivation by every single member of the vast community of Saivites spread over the world of the

right insights, that extra sensory perception we discussed earlier which has been bestowed on man by the infinite *Will* of Siva. It is the immeasurable, incomprehensible, ineffable grace of Siva, designated in Saiva scriptural texts as *Tiruarul*, *Tiruvadi Sevadi*, *Malaradi*, *Thaal*, *Kazhal*, *Paadam*, and concretised as the Sakti in Siva, *udaiyaal*, the Divine Mother.

Self-manifested He came as Ammai-Appan, unthipara

It is the supernal *link*, the Power of Siva's Grace.

By intuitive wisdom, one knows—unthipara.

—Tiruvunthiar

Siva in His pure Being, in an ultimate, essential Form (Swarupa Lakshana) is Knowledge which is both knowing and revealing. Like agni or heat functioning as solar energy, electric energy or gastric energy in manifestation—(Tatastha Lakshana), His pervasive Grace (Will) functions in a positive way. Its manifestations respond to specific needs in relation to life and the world, and are extolled by the Saiva seers as *Siva-karunai*, the Anugraha or gracious activity of Siva.

Conversely, it is *Mei Arivu*, knowledge of Truth, the ultimate essential nature or pure energy. There is no discontinuity between these two natures, the ultimate nature and energy connoting pervasiveness and its functional variations—knowledge that conceals and knowledge that reveals as grace. *Mei-Jnanam* or pure knowledge is synonymous with revelatory grace.

A general *will* becomes a specific function in order to cause maturing of the impurity of the soul. Then it assumes the aspects of *Ichha Sakti*, *Kriya Sakti* or *Jnana Sakti*, and initiates cosmic operations, and effects the evolution of the impure world of matter.

Divine operations of grace are conceived as transcendental and yet continuous with the phenomenal process. What we have to understand is the aspect of ParaSivam as pure Being

in its absolutely indeterminate and unconditioned level, prior to "Being with Will." For the purpose of redeeming the souls from bondage to liberation, the process of divine self-manifestation initiates the cosmic operations. *Being with Will* is comprehended as grace and knowledge from the perspective of the bound soul in its interaction with the world of matter.

In God's grace is conjoined law and order. In the Arul Pattu" Decad of Tiruvacagam, this immanent form of God-head as well as His transcendent nature is described:

Thou the Light, Thou the Law,
Thou the luminous Wisdom, Thou the Truth.

When human will is united with divine will, human actions cease to bind. To those not so united with His will (power-centre), He metes out the "karmic law" in order to cure them of their natural obstructions. The life of man in tune with the will of Siva is not an object of knowledge, but one of expansive life and can only be lived serenely in the concrete awareness of Siva's grace.

The myth of Siva in the half-male and half-female form of *Arthanariswara Siva*, typifies the "He, She and It" factors of Siva's unfathomable mystery of his divine *Leela* (sport) and infinitude.

The Lord who cannot be apprehended by finite knowledge.

He must be contemplated by spiritual insight.

Sivajnanabotham. Sutra IX.

Such heightening insights into the uncharted realms of Siva's grace are unravelled as the central theme in the *Periyapuranam*. In the section on Tirujnana Sambandar, Sekillar focuses attention on the injunction reiterated by the child-saint in every canto sung by him, that mankind can get rid of all entrenched karmas and other obstacles on the illumined path of self-knowledge, he only he would "sing with steadfast

love and one-pointed concentration of mind, his efficacious heart offerings to the Lord."

"Valankol paadal valla vaimayaar
Ullankol vinaipoi ongi vaazhvaare".

In one of his last farewell cantos, St. Sambandar refers to his abstaining from domestic felicity; he does not want to go through the marriage ceremony and lays emphasis on the necessity for total dedication at the altar of Truth in order that his invigorating songs, vibrant with integral love of Siva may reinforce the faith and devotion of all truthful servitors of the Lord. He vows that they who continue to worship the Lord with his garland of verses shall certainly enjoy Siva's beneficial grace for all time. Hence his self-abnegation.

Kallur perumanam vendaa kazhumalam
Pallur perumanam paadu mei aaithila
Sollur perumanam sudalare thondar
Nallur perumanam meiya nambaane".

Not for me is the nuptial rite
Of stepping on the grinding stone.
In Seerkazhi and other holy temples
I have sung many fragrant verses of praise
Which song-offerings might lose their efficacy
And truthfulness, that saiva devotees in ages to
come
May cease to sing my songs before your inner shrine,
Oh Lord who presides over the Temples at Perumanam.

In the lyric of Flaming Love (Pidditha Pattu), Manicavasagar too speaks of the soul of man clinging to the blessed Feet of grace and the efficacy of true worships :

Thou illumined my soul in response to my worship
And revealed Thy gracious Feet within.

—Tiruvacagam 37.7

The emphasis here is on self-effort. So too, St. Sundarar exhorts man to do his own ordained duties in life in obedience to the will of Siva for carrying out the cosmic processes and the removal of the natural obstructing impurities.

How can I ever forget my Lord?

He makes all my actions His actions

Let His remembrance alone shine in my heart.

St. Appar vindicated at every critical situation, his perfect resignation and surrender to the Lord presiding in the Hall of Wisdom at Thillai.

Thillai maanagar Chitambalavaanarku

Ellai illathor adimai poondenuke .

The great mystic poets of the East and West freely admit the certitude of God's all embracing grace. But nowhere can we find such relentless pursuit of it, as in the life of the indomitable Sundaramurthi Nayanmar, the faithful companion of Siva, who articulates in the language of the heart, the pangs of separation, the yearning to be free from the choking sensation arising from the categories of existence, and his plaintive plea not to withhold His gracious Feet.

Oh great Master! I have been ever your companion sweet,

How can I now dissociate myself from you?

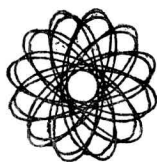
Neither can you sever your connection with me.

There is the common denominator that characterised all the Saiva Nayanmars in the *Periyapuranam*. It is their unconditional, unquestioning surrender, resignation and love to "Emperuman-our mighty Master". Their mellifluous songs

continue to resound in the deeper recesses of the hearts of all lovers of Siva and act as a panacea to cure the ills of the world:

I have taken your name of "Five Letters"
As my defensive armour and lisp It
Continuously moving my tongue only.
I am not an intruder into your sanctum
For seven birth, I have served you faithfully
Even if you push me out I'll not move an iota.
Clad in Holy Ash, in worship I bow meekly.
Ah, you know I seek your refuge only
O Lord who presides in Thillai's Hall of Wisdom.

—St. Tirunavukarasu





REVEALED TRUTHS IN THE SAIVA PATHWAY

THE age of the common man demands a twofold directive power; he needs a temporal head of the country he lives in to direct him to an ordered life in society, and also he expects a realised teacher, a Jnanacharya, who in Saiva tradition is also a servitor, to lead him to attain lasting values extolled in the Holy Saiva scriptures. Thus the cherished goal of the common man is not wealth or fame, but the enjoyment of the tranquillity of peace in the temporal and spiritual dimensions of living. The Saiva-Neri or pathway enunciates that on the threshing floor of morality, life on earth could be lived in a grand style of righteousness, peace, plenty and freedom.

The Testament of the Explorers of Truth

The sixty-three Saiva seers belonged to diverse areas, varied sects, castes, interests and vocations. They demonstrated thereby that worldly status and privileges have very little significance in establishing the Kingdom of Siva in the hearts of men. Their heart's cry was, "Dive deep within and find the light and love of Sivam." We see that each of the sixty-three saints conformed to the way of life enjoined in his own particular society. He fulfilled his role as a worker of God in the light of his own measure, and not by imitating the dharma of others. We see this trait in the lives of Tirunalaipovar, St. Kannappar and Apoothiadigal. Though they belonged to different strata of society, yet while fulfilling their distinctive roles in their community, they shared the common denominator by their intense love for God and fellow-man. The objective of the *Periyapuranam* is brought out in the first line of the opening verse which was divinely inspired :

Ulagellam Unarnth Othart Kariyavan.

He whose glory cannot be discerned nor praised by
the whole world.

Sekillar projects the whole world as being sustained by the testament of the Legion of Sivathondar and the Guru Paramparai. Amidst diverse pursuits, ranks, backgrounds and upbringing, these earnest preceptors and men of God lived and moved with their fellow beings, activated by one-pointed yearning for the realisation within of "Anbe Sivam", God is Love.

In Siva was he rooted; he saw Him everywhere.

In the will of Siva did he discern all things,

Transcending consciousness of past, present and
future,

And duality ceasing he realised sweet serenity.

—Tirumantram 127

He who's beyond the visible universe, came down on
earth

As a Guru to abide in the hearts of the virtuous

And illumined them by His grace and made them His
own.

The peerless Siva is the priceless Natguru'

—Tirumantram 1576

A purview of some fundamental insights gained by the study of the works of Nayanmars immortalised in the *Periyanam* opens a vast field where the subject-matter is not primarily concerned with thinking or believing, but with doing. In the case of anything that is done, it is the ultimate end which constitutes the first principle and cause of the whole thing; for it is that which sets the agent in motion. The foundation of the entire Saiva culture is projected on this first principle. It is not the individual that is the final goal,

but rather *the proper function of that being*. Thus Saiva Tamil poetry, dialogues and narratives become a dynamic vehicle of communication to express the function proper to the Saivites as a whole, for which the totality of man is ordained, to which function of saints and seers who moved with the common multitude, neither one man nor one particular community can claim monopoly.

What distinguishes these great Nayanmars is the potentiality and clarity of their understanding, and this is revealed in a multiplicity of acts. Their lives and living words begin to be luminous, and hence their natural sway over others is assured. The essence of their humanity is bereft of all accidental factors, and their lives are a continuous realisation of the total knowledge and love of which they are capable. *In them we see the potential intellect, intuition, and will translating into dynamic experiences and actions.*

It is the goal of Saiva-Thamil culture through the *Periyapuranam* to realise all the potentialities of the Saivites by developing in peaceful co-operation all the capacities of individuals, families, communities and the State. This translation of potentiality into actuality by the act of a divine power is the secret charm of the *Periyapuranam*. It is a superb *Puranam* which deals with a series of experiences and actions, and a deep study leads to the revelation of the Self within the self, as was testified to in the modern age by the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and the Siddhacharya Siva Yoga Swami of Ilankai.

Mediators of Benevolent Dharma

The first requisite for the realisation of Saiva Dharma is universal peace—peace at all levels to men of goodwill. Peace followed in the footsteps of the Nayanmars and where it was thwarted, these prophetic seers ruthlessly purged all discordant factors, so that *concord* might prevail. Equanimity in thought, word and deed was acknowledged to be the criterion whereby the community attained to its proper stature.

Whenever peace prevailed in the Saivite kingdoms, the communal life of the Saivites attained a high standard of excellence in all spheres of activity.

In the *Periyapuranam*, Sekillar cites many situations where unity of direction becomes necessary in order to secure efficiency in collective action of any kind. There is a classical example of the restraint of the elder saint Appar when the young child-saint Sambandar was chosen to quell the rising tide of alien cults in the Pandyan kingdom, the seat of Saiva-tamil culture at the beginning of the seventh century. Sekillar describes in lucid verse St. Sambandar's first appearance at the Court of Madura :

The countenance of wisdom, the sole guide of the
Vedas shines like.

The light of the moon that quickens the flowers to
bloom.

He sings the glory of Sivā with kontrai garlands,
And in the melody that rises from his tuneful songs,
They perceived his true greatness.

—Periyapuranam 728

Here we see the excellence of the path of collective action, mooted by St. Appar, Kulaichirayar, the minister, and Queen Mangaiarkarasi under the inspiring unity of direction afforded by the young Sambandar in order to vanquish the autocratic monopoly of the Jain hierarchy from the Pandyan territory.

Further the *Periyapuranam* elucidates that laws exist as rules to direct life. The common rule to peace stepped up the search for unity among the Saiva masses. The principle of concord was observed in general as well as in particular situations. In those days, the well-regulated society of the Tamils was based on benevolent love and concord. It was empowered by the unity of will which was possible only under a unified directing power. The *Periyapuranam* brings to the

fore the fulfilment of the Saiva-Tamil aspirations for peace and concord at all levels of living.

In this masterpiece of divine-human relationships, integral oneness was seen to be the root of *being good*. Whenever this principle was violated, we saw that disunity had plunged the Chera, Chola and Pandyan lands of South India in utter confusion from time to time in ages preceding the Thevaram saints, and the era of destructive conquests that followed the golden age of Sekillar. Multiplicity leads to discord. All concord depended on unity of will, and this was the great teaching of the *Periyapuranam*. The people of different grades whom we meet in this *puranam* were all energised by the power of goodwill and concord, emanating from their servitude to Siva.

At the inaugural ceremony of the release of Sekkilar's *Periyapuranam*, he was led in procession on an ivory carved chariot with his completed magnum opus. The ruler of the Chola kingdom, King Anapaya Chola was seated behind the author and was fanning him. The benefactor and the beneficiary became so inter-related, knit by the unity of *Will*, that the people saw the essential unity of direction and action generating currents of dynamic power. That existence involves unity, as unity involves goodness was amply demonstrated not only in this moving spectacle, but also in the life of every one of the Nayanmar immortalised in the *Periyapuranam*.

Saiva-Neethi—The Universal Pattern of Law

Swadharma is the standard of truth and conduct in one's own life, and absolute dharma is the ruling power of God, by whom all things are done through *Swakarma*. What is meant by *Saiva-Neethi* is consistent with the self-integration and self-realization of a man-one who has done what there was to be done. These ideas are of the essence of the Indian axiology.

Plato defined justice as the doing of one's own work, according to one's nature. Dante goes a step further when he asserts:

Would it be worse for man on earth, were he no citizen? And may that be, except men live below diversely and with diverse offices?..And if the world down there took heed to the foundation Nature layeth and followed it, it would have satisfaction in its fold.

—Dante, *Paradiso* VIII 115

Saiva-Neethi implies the concept of justice. The norm of right—German *Recht*, Latin *Jus*—must be understood in all its phases, if we are to appreciate the *Saiva-Neethi* extolled by Sekillar. The interpretation of *Saiva-Neethi* is of value for the explanation of institutions. The fundamental meaning of the Greek term is justice, rendered in the *New Testament* as *righteousness* and as *Lex-Law* in Rome. In Indian terminology, *Dharma* is the universal pattern or law and embraces rule and order under the sun.

Since all good exists in the Supreme Being, the norm of justice too is to be found in His will. It follows that Siva as artificer is perfect, and His instrument of nature is in perfect order. In *Sivam*, the will and what is willed are identical and it follows that the divine Will is Right itself. Whatever is not consonant with the divine Will cannot be Right.

In the *Periyapuranam* we see the dynamic *Saiva Neethi* at work as the cosmic law and as the universal law of all order under the sun. *Swadharma* is that share of this law for which every man is made responsible by his physical and mental constitution and propensities. There is therefore the natural law that is eternal. They are the universal and particular aspects of one and the same law.

The *Periyapuranam* certainly directs us to perceive all things in their temporal and eternal significance which is the

characteristic of all traditional cultures. That Godliness should illumine life at every point is the final message of this *Puranam* which deals with the lives of the Saiva-Tamil seers, who lived and worked like ordinary men. They were all imbued with the idea of work as worship and worship in work, which was at once a doctrine and a discipline.

The splendour-born band of men, holy and fearless in the service of their supreme Master and Lord had made a unique contribution to the perpetuation of *Saiva-Neethi* by their distinctive election and mode of self-denial and self-surrender. They belonged to the grand order of nobodies in the service of Siva, and a Saivite of any caste or status can become a Nobody and work out his *swadharma*.

In the *Periyapuranam*, the servitors of Siva are termed "heroic" (*Veerar*) as they lack nothing. Each one of them knew the first and the last step to be taken, involving renunciation of all lesser attachments. In the panorama of the *Periyapuranam*, every man is a pilgrim; and he moves onwards steadily growing by his love into the stature of Siva till, finally, he effects a total renunciation of all fleeting values.

The stages of the gradual change in their lives are clearly brought out by Sekillar against the background of the historical and religious traditions of the age, the occupation and social obligations of the one concerned and above all, in the relentless pursuit of the goal which is communion with the luminous, auspicious Siva. Their joyous and dedicated lives do not savour of penitential sinfulness or craving supplication. They live and move as citizens in a natural way, but they reflect a pure self, illumined with the light of Siva's grace.'

Those historical situations described in the lives of the Saiva saints may refer to the bygone past, but they reveal both a psychological and a moral insight into the social and religious code of the Tamils. They are valid today as in the Middle Ages during the heyday of the Chola and Pandyan kings, when they lived and moved as man among men.

The potent power of Siva termed also as the feminine principle of Uma-sakti is the channel for Siva's Grace, and forms an indispensable link in the human-divine Bi-unity. We are struck by the perennial waves of divine grace as they lap on the heart's shores, where dwell the inheritors of Siva's Love. Every act of these Nayanmars is seen as an act of Siva's Grace. That was perhaps the reason why St. Sundarar was chosen by the divine power of Sivam to extol the holy band of devout bondsmen. In every instance, the Lord supported these saints by His testimony and initiation as seen in His intervention at the marriage ceremony of Sundarar. Those present complained of the dislocation and upsetting of all social norms of the day, but the objections to his marriage were proved correct by the production of "Padiolai and Mulaolai"—original and authentic documents.

A copy of the writ and the original deed were the documentary evidence that supported the justice of the claims of the objector to stop the marriage of Sundarar. The marvellous acts performed by these saints could have taken place only through a divine agency, and these acts of wonder confirmed the power vested in these servitors to do God's will. *Right* is a real and personal proposition of man to man which, when preserved, preserves human society. The essence of *Right* is not described in the *Periyapuranam*, but what it is in practice is declared for us to follow in its trail.

The *Periyapuranam* reveals the beauty of life lived in the presence of Siva with detachment and serenity. *Saiva-Neri* was nurtured in cosmic law and order which influenced the nature of man and of human destiny. The *Periyapuranam* was written by a mature scholar of wide experience after he had attained inner peace and inherent freedom.

These realised men of God moved from temple to temple and place to place, where they rectified flaws, misery, want and deviations in the communal life of the people whom they met, and they uplifted the hearts of men. They effected miracles

and restored natural order, wherever primal perfection was lacking. They were well-versed in the arts of healing and had recourse to myth-forms, parables and symbols to express their divine experiences in popular and melodious Tamil.

In Italy at about the same period of history as that of Sekillar in South India, Dante was striking new ground in transforming Western scholastic tradition by his direct, informal approach to the peasant classes. His works, *De-Vulgari Eloquentis* and *Le Vita Nuova*, in popular Italian dialect were a deviation from the courtly language of Latin. He refined the language of the common man by embodying in simple Italian lyrical poesy the eternal verities of Truth, Love, Beauty and Suffering.

It is a striking coincidence that at about the same period of history, Sekillar carried on the refinement of Tamil poetry by writing his classic on the lives of Nayanmars in popular Tamil and used the sonorous Virutham metre. The picture of the lone bard of Florence, facing mounting opposition from the nobility who advocated Latin is in sad contrast to the popular and revered Sekillar, who had the spontaneous acclamation of the masses and the royalty to his *Periyapuranam*. This brings out the two differing traditions with their significant impact on the peoples of two varying cultures. Dante's isolation marked the beginning of the advent of scientific humanism in the West, while the affirmation of Sekillar was a stepping-stone to the continuation of the undying Saiva-Neri.

The pathway to Siva in *Periyapuranam* proclaims the unique truth of how a whole nation with one accord considered the superiority of the love of Siva as the royal way to God, *Deiva Neri* over the *Ulaga-Neri*—the way of the world, and upheld it as man's supreme goal in life. Hence from the king down to his lowliest subject, we read of their reverence towards these God men, who were immersed in truth, love and the grace of Siva. Sekillar analysed and dived deep in order to reveal the profundity of the working

of love in the core of man's being, and its expansion in the outward acts and words of these holy servitors. He fully immersed himself in pure devotion, and makes us also thirst with our whole being for that divine nectar of Siva's Grace—Arul.

Sekillar having been a skilful minister of state weighs the actions, compositions and magnetic resources of these sixty-three Elect in the perspective of the Saiva pathway (Neri) and enables us to draw the inference, meanings and values which have a continuity and sustaining power to enrich our own religious experience. The mere presence of these enlightened power-carriers in a society to which they no longer belong, but which affirms the values upheld by them, certainly acts as a tonic against degenerating forces of materialism. The sixty-three Nayanmar with the collective number *nine* of the devoutly faithful, representing the whole world, are the repositories of the Saiva Dharma today and articulate the relevance of *Saiva-Neethi* for all time.

The keystone of the *Periyapuranam* is divine grace for admission to the fraternity of the servitors of Siva. It leads to the attainment of Siva-gathi, the bliss of Siva. The last couplet in *Sivajnanabotham* refers to the bliss of liberated souls, the Jivan Muktas, "enjoying the blessed company of the Sivathondar."

In the *Tiruvacagam*, St. Manicavasagar prays for admission to the assembly of the holy lovers of Siva:

Ever grant thy bondsman the grace to dwell

Amidst the holy band of devout lovers.

Thus my soul's yearning shall be fulfilled.

— Temple Lyric I

In Saivism, the loving company of the devout is looked upon as a high reward, and Sekillar expounds so fully and ecstatically this aspect of the pathway to God,

The Legion of Siva-Thondar—Servitors of Siva

In the opening stanzas of the *Periyapuranam*, Sekillar delineates the august assembly of holy men gathered in the sacred Hall called *Devasiriyam* at the *Tiruvavarur* temple.

It was like a thousand seas of milk,
Sparkling in the luminosity of the holy ash;
Of shining mien are these radiant devotees,
And resounding is their chant of mystic letters Five. 3

They worship the Feet of Him, the Primal Cause,
And sway as mighty rulers of this earth—
From global corners are they gathered here
And the world lies encamped at their feet.

Their resplendent countenance lights up
Every side and their ineffable glory
None can extol. These men are as pure inside
As the holy ash adorning their spotless frames.

They forget not the fragrant Feet of Him
Who moves with Shakti imbued with Love,
They uphold the way of virtue in meekness,
Flawless gems are they in rock-like grandeur.

Blessed with wealth and great learning,
Alms-bowl and gold they view as equable,
In love serene they sing His praise
And not hanker after deliverance even.

—4. Thiru-kootu Chirappu

Thus we see the panorama of a society of Godmen who affirmed by their existence, the social order of Saivam and

Tamil culture. They upheld the moral law of the cosmos and realised their own perfection, so that kings and common men bowed in reverence to them, as was seen in the life of Tirujnana Sambandar and St. Sundarar and a host of others. They did not preach any new doctrines but only interpreted the cosmic order of the world. The order of the moral law—*Saiva-Neethi*—of the universe, immanent and eternal was made intelligible and they embodied in their own lives and teachings the universal logic of rightenousness in which the rational and ethical elements were integrated into a whole.





PERIYAPURANAM'S PERCEPTION OF REALITY

TODAY man faces the challenges of the Atomic Age. He is lured into unlimited expansion in all fields of activity. scientific, technological and economic developments have led to nuclear individualism and competitive integration between man and man, and between social groups and nations, East and West, North and South and a spell of disaster. Self-assertion and self-monopoly have assumed gigantic proportions in a finite world where man absorbed in material growth and acquisition has failed to recognise the cosmic law of balance between expansion and decline. Maximum growth will have to face diminishing returns and so will continue the aching tones of the still sad music of humanity.

Reality has to be recognised in toto and not compromised. A significant shift to qualitative value-systems has become imperative today. Questions like, Who am I? Naan yaar', What is man's goal? Where lies happiness? become persistent, leading more and more people to explore the inner self and its development. While natural resources and energy production are mercilessly exploited, the reserves of man's inner energy are left untapped.

From such unbalanced state of affairs prevailing all over the world, it is no wonder that violence and chaos are threatening world peace and humanity groans and wails, weakened, slaughtered and engulfed in crisis upon crisis. How is man to be awakened from the stupor of unreality to the knowledge of the real? A revaluation of our intrinsic Hindu concept of *Saiva-Neethi* underlying our value systems and a restoration of our spiritual tradition become urgent. *Saiva-Neethi*

implies that every activity of man becomes meditative in conformity with the dynamic macrocosmic order as well as in full awareness of the microcosmic matrix.

Such a balanced approach to life is the rewarding study of the *Periyapuranam*, where life-energies are divested of prodigious display of dissipating waste and destruction, and channelled into activities of dynamic spiritual growth and qualitative expansion of the inner energy levels of the self within. In the mysterious calculus of God-centred love, man discovers the centre within, and the circumference outside himself. The *Periyapuranam* attests the truth that in the "soundable" centre of each being, there can be infinite "echoes". Every man is capable of perception and experience of truth in a variety of ways. The Saiva seers have affirmed that in the continual moving flux of energy-levels, the creation of a dynamically stable "witnessing centre" can alone ensure peace and harmony for humanity.

Saiva-Neethi—A Revaluation

We begin to understand the essence of *Saiva-Neethi* in the way of life exemplified by the Saiva peers Tirumular, Thirujnana sambandar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundarar and Manicavacagar. The cyclical bio-energising processes pulsating within their consciousness were in harmony with their dynamic world. Their transpersonal experiences and their participation with the common masses with whom they lived and moved and had their close association had a profound influence in strengthening the crucial gaps in the Saiva way of life.

In the golden age of Sekillar Peruman, from the ruling monarch to the humble peasant, people of all ranks were inspired with a new vision of Reality. *Saiva-Neethi* revitalised the law of love and harmony and the balanced code of justice effected by the benign use of energy resources externally and internally. It ushered in an era of peace and goodwill in the Saiva kingdoms of the Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Sekillar's *Periyapuranam* is

rooted in the perception of *Saiva-Neethi*—the way of life enshrined in the Saiva scriptures, and the art and sciences embodied in Tamil Culture. It is the perception of Reality established on the intuitive awareness and unitive experience of the oneness of life *in Sivam for Sivam, with Sivam*, reflecting its multi-faceted cycles of change and manifestation. Tirumular, the author of the mystic poem of *Tirumantram*, declares the truth of anma, the divine-human entity, linked to the cosmos as a whole and participating in a higher order of spiritual existence :

Naan arintanre irukinra iraivanai
 Vaan arintaar, ariyaatu mayankinar
 Unarintu ulle uyikinra onncudar
 Taanariyaan pinnai yaar arivaarare ?

I realised the truth of God-consciousness in me.
 The celestials failed to understand and were confused.
 That luminous Radiance within your body frame
 Who else can know That unknowing Self.

—Tirumantram VII 9.5

The *Periyapuranam* stipulates the fundamental oneness and dynamic nature of all natural and special phenomena. This awareness generated by our Saiva seers enables man to follow in their footprints and take to voluntary simplicity, freed from economic and sociological pressures. He develops with steadfast devotion his self-knowledge and thereby learns to expand inter-personal relationships, echoed by the Tamil Sangam poets:

In direct experiential understanding of oneness,
 View every country as your native place,
 And everyone whom you meet as your kith and kin.

—Purananuru

The comradeship of the discerners of Truth knows no boundaries of race, class or creed. These spiritual explorers speak with one voice of the power that is the source of the sun, is also the source of all that exists in the system, and so it must be the source of the light that is discerned within ourselves. *Sat*—Pure Being—and *Chit*—Pure Consciousness constitute the Reality behind man's groping thoughts. The spiritual essence of this Vision of Reality projects a unifying advaitic value-shift which is not imposed from outside. It is organically experienced as recorded in the lives of Kannapar, Karaikal Ammayar, Cheraman Perumal, Queen Mangaiarkarasi and other Saiva seers quoted in the *Periyapuranam*. We perceive a sense of transformation of energy, as we realise the secret of their relationship to the Supreme Siva—*Sat-Chit-Ananda*. There stirs the transluming vibrations of divine Grace as we begin to understand their intense awareness which takes man beyond the bonds of rational thought into the field of unitive experience.

A new process gets started. Man realises the gaps in his mind and his energy centres within get concentrated to break through the layers of ignorance. He begins to *see* from within. He contacts the spark of energy that fills him with vitality. There is an urgency for all, be they Saivites or not, to read and re-read *Periyapuranam*. On its vibration can be built up a higher sense of consciousness and direct awareness. Earnest aspirants can then see through their own internal landscapes, illumined insights and wisdom's bliss.

Mei-Jnanam—The Majestic Realisation of Oneness

The essence of insight has been unfolded in exquisite form by St. Manikavacagar in the *Tiruvandapahuti* canto in the *Tiruvacagam*:

The subtle One not perceived by the intellect
I have *seen* the Pure Awareness,
Consciousness that is Siva,

With my inner eye I have seen
Do you also make a bid to see?

Mercy's grandeur I have seen—you too see.

Here is an experience of instantaneous perception of the power-centre and the power-carrier, Siva and His inherent Sakti, indwelling in one's consciousness. This is the new insight communicated by the Saiva seers in their collections of poems known as The *Tirumurais*. Sekillar's *Periyapuranam* takes us to the core of the self's awareness of Siva as the subject, implying continuous memory—*Jnanam*, the self's submission to Siva—*Kriya*, and its instinted devotion—*icchai*.

These Saiva explorers of Truth articulate the desperate need of man to get rid of impure motives and false assumptions and gain illuminating insights. They have clearly marked out the stages and hurdles to be overcome in the acquisition of this supernal awareness—Siva—Consciousness.

*Urai unar viṇanthu nintru unarvathar unarve
yaan unnai uraikumaaru unarhe.*

Surpassing all finite consciousness,
Illumine my insight that I may truly perceive Thee.

Unarvkum therivarum porule
Innangili ella uyirkadagum uyire.

O Reality transcending finitude,
Immanence non-pareil, Soul of all souls.

Innangili is a poignant Tamil term used here to bring out the beauty of Siva's *immanence*, indissolubly intermingled with the seeing *Anma*.

In the *Periyapuranam*, the compelling power and love of the Saiva elect have been depicted with singular beauty by Sekillar. These pilgrims of the inner odyssey testify in their hymns to the exalted mode of the infinite, the abounding sense of the reality within underlying the phenomenal universe of man and nature. Their quest invariably ended in conquest.

In compassionate radiance, they bid us speed to the source of Being, where the self realises the Parasivam.

Yaanaar? Emathaar? Paasamaar? Enna maayam?
Avan than kurippe kurikundu pomaar amaimin.

Ponder intently on who *I am* and what is *mine*,
 What are attachments? Oh what delusion!
 Pursue steadfastly the fulfilment of His Will
 As the goal of life and swerve not from the path.

—Tiruvacagam - The Song of the Pilgrim

The vision of Reality in the *Periyapuranam* makes explicit the magnificence of the manifested world as a field of experience for the spirit of man. Finite man finds himself, here and now, in the centre of the infinite self, the nucleus of Being, freed from the multi-fetters of multi-dimensional bonds. *Irumayin Orumayum*, Two in One, in the words of Jnana Sambandar, culminating in *Orumayin Perumaiyum*—the divine Bi-unity. It is the communion of the *Pasu* with *Pathi*, the *anma* with God.

Thus the *Periyapuranam* embodies an enriching storehouse of Saiva religious lore going back to two thousand years and the Saiva tradition going back to five thousand years. The Saiva seers whom we encounter in this grand epic of Saivam represent the collective wisdom and the unfoldment of the four Saiva Agamic pathways of *sariyai*, *kriyai*, *yoga* and *jnanam*—dedicated action, virtuous conduct, discipline and knowledge. The sonorous Name of Siva filled their whole being and existence and activated their consciousness:

Invoking Siva-Siva the bliss of Siva is attained.
 Siva Siva ena Siva gathi thaane.

—St. Tirumular

The Vedas proclaim as absolute Truth,
The Name of the Supreme Lord—Namasivaya
Veda naangninum meiporulaavathu
Naathan naamam Namasivayave.

—St. Jnana Sambandar

What sacrificial penance did I do
For the gift of Sivayanama to be ever mine?
Naaneyo thavam ceythen
Sivayanama enap petren

—St Manicavasagar

The pillar of strength is Namasivaya,
Nattunai yaavathu Namasivayave.

—St. Appar

Even if the Lord is mentally forgotten by me.
My tongue will lisp Namasivaya spontaneously.
Nattava unnai naan marakinnam
Sollu naa Namasivayave.

—St. Sundarar

The sixty-three saints extolled in the *Periyapuranam* considered themselves the servitors of Siva, upholding the Saiva way of life *Saiva-Neethi* and vindicating by their lives and works the goal of the vision of Truth *Mei-Jnanam*. They magnified the praise of the transcendent Sivam and worshipped His immanent forms, indwelling in their hearts and manifested in the temples visited by them. The Holy Ash and the "Letters Five"—the mystic Name of Siva—were the symbolic insignia of the Saivite faith, which they propagated with profound intensity.

The compilation of the twelve *Tirumurais*, sacred collections of poems, and the lives of these Saiva saints has been a stupendous work, divinely guided and executed under the patronage of Kings Raja Raja Chola and Kulottunga Anapaya Chola in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This treasury of poems and the epic, the *Periyapuranam* were rendered in authentic traditional tunes (pann) by qualified singers of the panar clan in the temples and forums to enhance the harmonious living that marked the rich heritage of Tamil Saiva Culture. St. Sekillar's *Periyapuranam* followed the efflorescence of the creative period of Saiva devotional literature and encompassed global perspectives. His opening canto invoking the light of wisdom and divine grace of Siva strikes the poignant note of universal appeal when he begins with the clue word *Ulagellaam*, divinely inspired and signifying global dimensions. The monumental epic on the holy servitors—Tiru Thondar—enas on the same key-word of *Ulagellaam* embracing universal benevolence.

Here is Sekillar's Invocatory Hymn:

Ulagellaam unarnthu othatku ariyavan
 Nilavulaaviya neermali veniyan
 Alagil sothiyan ambalathu aaduvaan
 Malar chilambadi vaazhihi vanaguvaam.

The *Universe* of created beings cannot intuit Him
 Nor can they comprehend Him, so peerless is He.
 Yet in His manifest Form, He has matted locks
 And the crescent moon and Ganga on his head.
 Self-luminous is He who dances in the open space.
 Let us adore and worship His vibrant, fragrant Feet.

The last canto in Sekillar's *Periyapuranam* strikes the chord of everlasting remembrances of the holy band of the

servitors of Siva, on the crescendo of universal love by the universe of created beings.

Entrum inpam perugum iyalpinaal
 Ontru kaathalithu ullamum ongida
 Mantrulaar adi yaaravar vaan pugall
 Nintra thengum nilavi *Ulagellaam*.

Their nature ever suffused with radiant bliss,
 Their hearts exalted in one-pointed love,
 These servitors who laud the Lord of Cosmic Dance,
 Their sublime glory permeates the whole *universe*.

The *Periyapuranam* closes on the Divine Word *Ulagellaam* given to St. Sekillar at the commencement of his magnificent epic of Saivam and connotes the global fulfilment of Love in the experience of ultimate Reality—Anbe Sivam—Sivam is Love infinite.

The vision of Truth knows no barriers. It expands its frontiers from the finite universe and beyond to infinity.



ENDURING INSIGHTS INTO THE TRUTH OF SIVA

WHEN we delve into the sparkling springs of the *Periya-puranam* we gain a clear insight into the fundamental reality that is Siva. The lives of the Saiva peers elevate us into a higher power of consciousness, and we perceive a sense of transforming vibrations of grace. The divine will is at work within as we get away from thought habits and beyond the bounds of rational analysis.

We enter spontaneously a similar field of experience as that of St. Appar who made real the potency of Siva's Name. Though he was tied to a granite stone and thrown into mid-sea, he was saved by the remembrance of the benevolent Name of Siva. Here a living contact was established between his will and the supreme divine Will that rules the world.

Such insights are gained by transmutation process at work deep within every man. Every spiritual condition has its laws as consistent as physical laws and the moral laws advocated in the *Tirukural* dealing with *aram* (cosmic moral order), *porul* (objective phases of activity) and leading to *inpam* (subjective phase of joy), which are in turn found to be tuned to inner spiritual laws, leading to the world of light and love experienced by the Saiva Nayanmars.

Luminous Rays of Spiritual Perception

In her *Atputha Tiruvanthathi*, St. Karaikal Ammayar recalls her inter-relationship with Siva :

The Knower is Himself; The subject of Knowledge too Himself, and the wisdom of Knowing also is Himself,

He is the object and subject of the universe.

He indeed is the goal of Absolute Reality.

St. Sambandar reminds man not to rely entirely on reason as the sole guide to discover his links with the Supreme Siva :

By inference and logic be not tempted

To probe into the Resplendent One, our Light.

St. Appar rouses man from the sense-slumber of unreality and bids him approach the Lord with faith and purity. To purify is to remove what has attached itself from outside to the inmost self. In the purity of one's own being, nothing can shatter one's inner unity. The Nayanmars proclaim with one accord that self-knowledge is our beauty and that in self-ignorance, we are ugly. If a man knows himself, he shall know Sivam. Tirumular reflects on the reality of Siva thus:

Discern the Truth as best as you can

Our Lord is so Real even if some deny Him.

Seek ye this goodly path.

Into the realm of man's daily existence step the seers of Siva, the Nayanmars, and unravel their unconditioned Awareness that shall free man from the imprisoned splendour of his divided personality. They enable us to enter into the inner chamber, the essence of one's being and recover inner felicity. In the study of the lives of the Nayanmars—the Saiva elect—as contained in the *Periyapuranam*, our main object was to find some enduring landmarks, some lofty traits of character and spiritual attainment, and assimilate what was good and noble, and aspire to reach the spiritual heights attained by them. We yearn to embody in ourselves their noble devotion to Siva. Tirumular, Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar come alive in Sekillar's

magnum opus; and we sit at their feet with an ardent desire to understand the undying self in man through their actions, songs, motives, aspirations and attainments. We become tuned to worship in temples as they did. We hear their cadences and place ourselves on a footing of friendship mingled with reverence, admiration and expectation.

The greatness of a deed and life becomes intelligible when we understand the underlying motives which actuate the deed and the principles of which that life is the expression. To judge the reality of a realised saint, to penetrate his very being is not possible until we have ourselves evolved to the plane on which we find the saint, until we ourselves are lifted to that beatific altitude of loftier thought and purer virtues. In order to understand and appreciate the real greatness of a servitor of Siva we must know his history as well as have an understanding of the history of his time. The correct background to the life of a man is found in his surroundings, his country, and the age in which he lived and worked. Unless we can enter into the consciousness of the people amongst whom he appeared, the stature of the saint will lose its true perspective.

It is in this meditative mood that we should approach the Saiva saints in order to receive through them a clearer vision of realms that are still in obscurity. The higher ideals that surge in our minds, half formulated and struggling for recognition find their interpretation in the life and works of these explorers of Truth. When we begin to read Sekillar's exposition on St. Appar's Odes on Koyil Thirukurun Thokai or Tiruthaandagama cantos, we stand transformed and revitalised. We are introduced into a higher state of consciousness and new realms of attainment open their vistas before us. Each Nayanmar portrays different phases of spiritual perception, and in the vast array of godly men who have adorned *Periyapuranam*, it is not difficult to find our ideal realised, to

find the saint whose remembrance will lighten our journey, upon whom we can look as our gracious guide, our beacon light and our witness.

We see in them not only humane actions to relieve the sufferings of their fellow-men, but victorious living. We witness their agonising trials and oppositions, and thereby learn to purify our hearts by fortifying the will power required for a consecrated life devoted to the service of Siva. We see not only the final victory of St. Kannappar or St. Sundarar or Queen Mangaiarkarasi, but also their challenges in all its fierceness—the warring elements against sloth and egotism, fear and depression—the struggles from within and the battle from outside. We are overjoyed at the sight of the stoic and fearless opponent of unconventional creeds, St. Jnana Sambandar, as he mounts the royal fortress, there to plant the banner of Saivism in the capital of the Pandyan kingdom. It is the triumph of Saiva-Neethi, the Law of Being, in all its completeness that thrills us, that makes the heart vibrate with dynamic realism.

In awe and veneration, we gaze at these servitors of Siva, as they stand before us in fulness complete, fulfilling the varied roles of a leader, a teacher, a lover of God, a reconciler, a humble householder, a temple-builder, a chieftain, a pursuer and the pursued, a reformer, a prophet, an ideal mother, a sister and a sahadharmini, bondsmen all of the legion of the Supreme Pathi, Siva. From afar, we join in this paean of praise:

You came as the silent teacher mine,
Ready to grant all boons however rare,
And with a mother's love you did unfold
Decking my head with those blessed Feet,
The eternal Law of Wisdom's ecstasy.

Bereft of thought or holy word revolved
 The superconscious Vision beyond all thought,
 Of Freedom's final state as one or two,
 As Light or Void, Form or Primal sound:
 Such is Beatitude; so hast Thou taught.
 Grant me thy Grace, Oh Lord to live that life
 Wherein are steeped time-honoured lovers thine.

—St. Tayumanavar.

Pilgrims of the Inner Odyssey

In a world of tansient exits and entrances, our reliance should be on sharpening our insights into the treasury of knowledge communicated in the grand epic of Saivism, the *Periyapuranam*. St. Sekillar's transmissions are consistent in concordance with the Saiva Agamas. *Tirumurais* which are the collected works of the Nayanmars and the Meikanda Sas-tras as well are in accordance with Revealed Truth.

Today we hail the Saints as custodians of wisdom, love, truth, and power. They are our ambassadors of goodwill and peace, who have taught us to move from one terrain to another without restrictive inner barriers. They show the way to free ourselves from the links of karma, delusion and ego-centredness. Armed with humility, the Name of Siva—"The Letters Five"—is their insignia. They are That. They are pure consciousness, *Chit*. These perfected men and women, bondsmen of Siva, are ever on the move, singing and walking to find fresh fields and pastures new. They become fused in the life of the community and their vigilance has often saved the social order from disruption, as St. Jnana Sambandar achieved in his exploits at Madurai at the appeal of Queen Mangaiarkarasi and the chief minister, Kulaichirayar.

The significant gain of a penetrating study of the *Periyapurānam* is to relume the dim embers of our faith in the divine power of God, and to rediscover and subscribe to the beauty of the love of God and fellow-men in all our acts and experiences. These servitors of Siva can lead bewildered humanity today from darkness to light, from the unreal to the real and from death to immortality.

Their rays of perception extend beyond the boundaries of space and time to undimensioned and extra-cosmic infinity, for they are the inheritors of the light of *Jnanam*—pure knowledge. They constantly remind us of the true being that we are, through the resonance of their selfless lives and their holy hymns—the *Thevarams*. Man's immortal self is like a dew-drop on a lotus leaf—tangent yet not adherent.

The *Mei-Adiyar* or votaries of Truth are the listeners, pathfinders, power-carriers, fore-knowers and inseparable lovers of that Interior Being, the dynamic power centre of all beings, and following in their foot-prints, Sekillar has made us know and realise that each of these pilgrims is the "self-of my-self." It is the sacred duty of all who owe allegiance to the servitors of Siva to keep the value-norms of Saiva-Neethi ever in circulation, and strengthen the integral links in human environment and activity.

Menmaikol Saiva-Neethi vilankuha Ulagamellam.

May the magnificent Saiva-Neethi,

Omnipervasive, the constant of all

The foundation of existence, illumine the whole world.

This was the awakening call of the enlightened servitors of Siva:

Siva whose Holy Feet danced in the hoary city of
Thillai

He abides in the hearts of countless beings, performing
 The mystic dance of life.
 He stands revealed in the beauty
 Of his myriad qualities;
 On terrestrial and celestial spheres,
 He unfolds or hides in the lore of Knowledge.
 He has completely overcome my ignorance.
 That love intense may flow from their hearts,
 He dwells within the core of His loved ones.

—Tiruvacagam 2.1-8.

The underlying theme of the *Periyapuranam* is the auspicious vision of Siva. The will of man, his consciousness is irresistibly drawn and dynamically to the divine Will, which is infinite Truth and its Law of Being.

Kadanthu nintran engum, kandu nintranc !

Transcending and All-Pervading, yet witnessing all.

—Tirūmantram 14.

Man acts with submission to the Law of Infinity with intuition of it, and passes from the particular to the universal, from the finite to the infinite Bliss supernal. That there is a centre of experience which is the mid-point of intuition from where stems the power of integration, intensification and deepening of the experience is the penetrating insight transmitted by the Saiva Seers in their *Tirumurais*. They intuited by a direct and auspicious vision of Siva, the unity of existence consummating in peace and bliss. It is the highest fulfilment of life. It is the realisation of the infinite Truth that is Siva in consonance with Saiva-Neethi, the law of the infinite whose dynamics is based on the rhythm of regenerative sacrifice

(yagna). The *Periyapuranam* presents their integrated perception of Truth both in vision and in fulfilment:

Oh Truth, Thy gleaming Feet I see
Blissful freedom is mine.

—Tiruvacagam 1.32

These time-honoured lovers of Siva have left their footprints in timeless Eternity. The way and the goal—*Siva-Neri* and *Siva-Gathi*—have been enshrined in *Periyapuranam*. In the direct perception of the truth of Siva, one is never alone. The Eye of Grace illumines within and without, and we hear the song of fulfilment reverberating in waves of pure experience—*Sivanandam* :

Peace in the storm, calm in the effort,
Strong in surrender, a luminous insight,
Pure Awareness suffused in serene love,
The effulgence of eternal Sivam stands Self-Revealed.

Ratna Ma Navaratnam, a well known educationist and scholar, was born in a pious family noted for Hindu culture, in Jaffna, Ceylon. She was educated in Presidency College, Madras, the Annamalai University and the Institute of Education, London. She has had a brilliant academic record, obtaining First Class in the English Honours Degree, M.Litt., Philosophy and M.A., Education, London with distinctions and Gold Medals. She was a delegate at the Geneva Conference for International Understanding in 1951, and continues to be an active member in many cultural and women's organisations, a past President of the Ceylon Federation of University Women, a Life Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, President of the National Education Society and on the Editorial Board of the 'Tamil Culture', Madras. For over ten years, she was head of Ramanathan College, a premier Hindu Institution in Ceylon and joined the Educational Service in 1944, where she continues to serve now as Education Officer in the Jaffna District.

She has written several books for children, books on poetry and appreciation of Indian Classics and her popular book on "New Frontiers in East—West Philosophies of Education" has been acclaimed as a bridge builder between East and West in Educational Thought and Practice. She has travelled widely in India, Western Europe and the United Kingdom.

Her inherited spiritual associations, her personal contacts with great religious mystics, thinkers and writers of East and West and coming under the potent influence of the Great Guru, Maha Yogar Swamigal of Columbuturai, but for whose benediction this book could not have been written — these enabled her to pursue relentlessly the search into the mystic fountains of the Saiva Siddhanta seers. In this task, she was guided by well known philosophers and scholars like Professor K. Subramaniam Pillai, Professor K. Swaminathan, Professor T.P. Meenakshisundaram and Dr. A. Chidambaranatha Chettiar.

The Annamalai University in 1946 published her thesis on "The New Approach to Tiruvacagam", and the present book. "The Vision of Siva in Periya Puranam" is a fitting successor to this work. In the style of Dante's Divine Comedy, she has captured the spirit of Great Poetry and winged it to the melody of Divine Love. Saint Manivacagar's 'Tiruvacagam' tugs at our heart-strings long after we close 'The Testimony of Love', for so indelible is her expression of the saint's immortal conquest of the Beloved, the Lord of Thillai. Likewise it bodies forth in matchless fervour, the eternal quest of Man.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has earlier published two books by the author, namely, (i) "Tiruvachakam—the Hindu Testament of Love" and (ii) "Kartikeya—the Hindu Testament of Wisdom."